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The RING

モンスター創造論

NAOYA INOUE: CREATING A MONSTER

SEPTEMBER 2019

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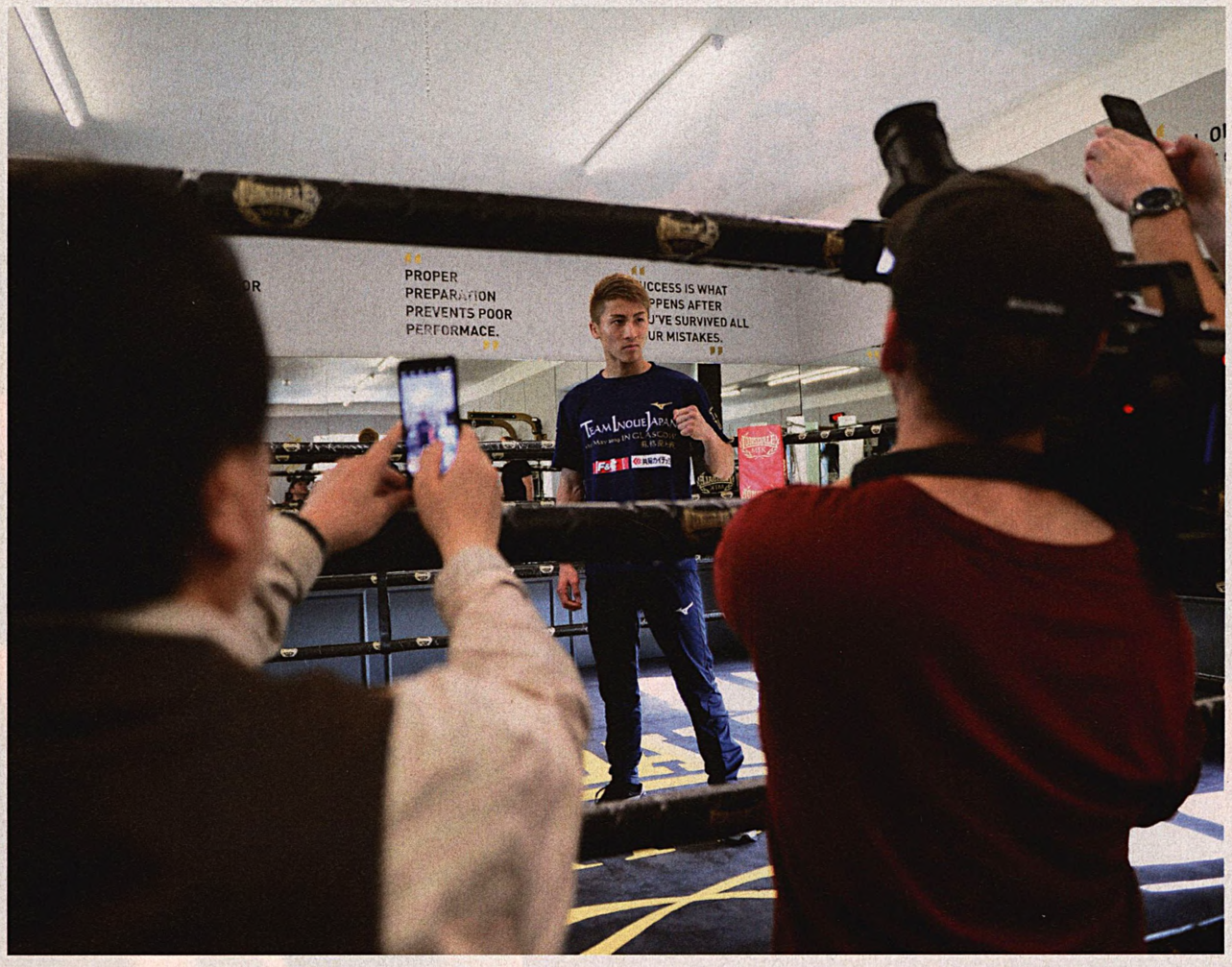

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Naoya Inoue poses for photographers during a media workout ahead of his World Boxing Super Series semifinal against Emmanuel Rodriguez on May 14 in Glasgow, Scotland.

MARK RUNNACLES

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY GEORGE MORIKAWA

OPENING SHOT

Most fans thought it was a bad idea for Paul Malignaggi (right) to participate in a bare-knuckle fighting match... and they were right. The retired two-division titleholder, known for fragile mitts and tender skin during his boxing days, broke his right hand and suffered a gruesome gash by his left eye thanks to the hard head of Artem Lobov, an MMA fringe contender who is part of Conor McGregor's crew (which is why the celebrated Showtime commentator wanted to scrap with him). Lobov won a close decision in an uneventful five-round bout.

PHOTO BY MATTHEW HEASLEY

RESHAPING THE HEAVYWEIGHT DIVISION

Andy Ruiz's takedown of Anthony Joshua was the best possible outcome for that fight. Not quite Tyson-Douglas, but it certainly ranks up there with Lewis-Rahman I and Klitschko-Sanders, both Ring upsets of the year, as this almost certainly will be too. This shocker upends the status quo of the heavyweight division and introduces a new player to it. Ruiz may not have looked the part, but his brilliant game plan – doubling up on the jab, thus negating the taller man's punching range, and forcing Joshua on the defensive – proved that skill and tactics win fights, not Apollo Creed-esque physiques. And that's not taking anything away from Joshua, a fine champion. The division is now wide open, and it doesn't hurt that it's courtesy of a Mexican Rocky whose first order of business was reassuring his mother that their struggles are over. Welcome to the big leagues, señor Ruiz. Fight long and prosper.

Brad Morris
Astoria, New York

If Andy Ruiz Jr. is the first Mexican-American heavyweight beltholder, what was John Ruiz? At the time, I remember hearing that he was the first Hispanic heavyweight beltholder. BoxRec shows both were born in the U.S., making them both U.S. citizens. I take it John Ruiz is descended from a different country than Mexico?

Joshua Bassan
Alexandria, Va.

EDITOR'S RESPONSE: John Ruiz, a Massachusetts native, is of Puerto Rican descent.

STACKED DECK

Why does it seem like promoters are more and more inclined to make sure their A-side fighters have an almost insurmountable edge by signing their opponents so close to fight dates? Their guy gets weeks of preparation in ahead of time knowing they'll be fighting on a certain date while the sometimes-good opponent, who often has a decent record, has to often fight a weight class higher than they normally would and with little time to prepare. The "0" has become so important that it hinders a fighter's development!! These fights are not "fixed" but they are certainly "setups."

Chris Schofield
Dartmouth, Nova Scotia

EDITOR'S RESPONSE: A cold, hard fact of early matchmaking for developing young prospects is that most need to be put in against opponents they are all but guaranteed to defeat. There are some exceptions to this cruel rule – decorated amateur champs, such as Vasiliy Lomachenko and Aleksandr Usyk, and dynamic talents, such as our cover star, Naoya Inoue, and some of his precocious countrymen (Kosei Tanaka and Hiroto Kyoguchi) come to mind – but even gifted, brilliant-boxing Olympic medalists like Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Andre Ward needed to be carefully matched for the first 10-15 bouts of their pro careers. Mayweather, hailed by some as a "The Best Ever," faced two opponents making their pro debuts and four with .500 or losing records during his first nine bouts. However, there is risk involved even with what you call "setup" matchups. In his seventh pro bout, Ward was matched with a tough Ohioan named Darnell Boone, who would go on to become one of the sport's most reliable gatekeepers. Boone dropped Ward hard in Round 4 of a difficult six-round bout in 2005. If an Olympic gold medalist as talented, skilled and dedicated as Ward can be in danger of being upset early in his career, think about what goes through the minds of the managers of "mere mortal" up-and-comers – especially in an era that (as you correctly pointed out) worships the unbeaten record and has little tolerance for losses at any stage of a boxer's career. A quick note in defense of promoters/matchmakers: The boxer's management generally has the last word on the quality of opposition, especially early in their careers (managers are often the individuals who have invested the most in the fighter, thus at financial risk). Promoters/matchmakers usually want to make fan-friendly bouts (in other words: tough fights that feature two-way action). This doesn't always happen, because they are either overruled by understandably cautious managers or, as is often the case, the original opponent falls out (for whatever reason – money dispute, being well over the contracted weight, failed commission test, etc.). Often when you hear or read that a "B-side" opponent took the fight on late notice, it is because he or she is the second or third replacement.

TWEET OF THE MONTH

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Pictured left to right: Damon Allen Jr., Jessie Vargas, Fernando Vargas

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RINGSIDE BY TOM GRAY

CHASING THE MONSTER

Naoya Inoue raises already high standards and expectations with each electrifying performance.

"Inoue is never gonna be hotter than he is right now."

Those were my words to Ring Magazine Editor-in-Chief Doug Fischer in October of last year when I suggested Naoya Inoue for cover star. The explosive Japanese power-puncher had knocked out former world titleholder Juan Carlos Payano in a World Boxing Super Series quarterfinal in Yokohama, Japan, and the method of victory had sent shockwaves through the sport. A blockbuster right hand had ended the fight in just 70 seconds.

Doug didn't need a lot of convincing.

The real test, however, would be securing Inoue for a cover story. The ability to network effectively is vital in the field of boxing writing. If you can't secure interviews with fighters and people on the inside, then you won't get very far in this business. For every door that closes, be prepared to kick down another one… and another one. Peter Banke, head of press for the World Boxing Super Series, was my first port of call, and Peter put me in touch with Masa Ueda. That was a blessing.

Masa, who lives in Japan, is highly respected and has a working relationship with several top-level fighters. As luck would have it, he was heading for Glasgow, Scotland, to meet up with four-weight world titleholder Nonito Donaire, who would be facing Ryan Burnett in the other WBSS quarterfinal on November 3. With me living just outside of Glasgow, Masa was able to arrange a telephone interview with Inoue from his hotel room and – crucially – he could translate.

The collaboration on the cover itself was extensive. Naoki Fukuda – perhaps the finest boxing photographer in the world – provided the image, while Doug, managing editor Brian Harty and art director Lamar Clark discussed design in an email thread that would have stretched from Los Angeles to Japan. That

attention to detail led to the cover being converted into a poster, which sold out in record time.

The rest is history; Inoue became the first Japanese national to adorn The Ring's cover since the magazine was founded in 1922 and the overall feedback was excellent. There was even a press conference in Japan announcing the magazine's release.

My personal mission then was to see Inoue fight live, and that was going to be tough. He had only fought once outside of Japan – a sixth-round stoppage of Antonio Nieves in Carson, California, in September 2017 – so the odds were against me. Japan is almost 6,000 miles away. What chance did I have? Not even in my wildest dreams could I have imagined that just six months after the Payano bout I would be driving 20 miles from my front door to watch Inoue fight.

When I first heard that Inoue would be facing IBF bantamweight titleholder Emmanuel Rodriguez in Glasgow on May 18, I didn't believe it. Scotland has hosted some great overseas names – Sugar Ray Robinson, Willie Pastrano, Mike Tyson, Terence Crawford and the aforementioned Donaire among them. But all of those great fighters had ventured here from the United States. Inoue in Scotland? Surely not.

But as the weeks went by and we got closer to fight time, I became a believer. Inoue and his fellow WBSS semifinalists – Rodriguez and junior welterweights Josh Taylor and Ivan Baranchyk – performed media workouts at a local MTK gym and I managed to secure brief interviews through fight week. Inoue's face lit up when he was told that it was me who had penned his cover story, and the entire team was a joy to be around.

Fight night was an absolutely surreal experience.

Taylor became Scotland's 14th world titleholder when he dropped Baranchyk twice en route to a 12-round unanimous decision, which saw him claim the IBF junior welterweight crown. The Edinburgh man fought brilliantly, and a unification battle with WBA counterpart Regis Prograis will follow later this year in the tournament final. The pair will also contest the vacant Ring Magazine championship at 140 pounds.

Inoue, as I expected, was dazzling.

The unbeaten Rodriguez had never been down in a professional prizefight. Many experts felt the classy Puerto Rican boxer-puncher would ask questions of Inoue, that his natural size advantage and skillset made him a serious threat. He didn't come close. When Inoue floored his man with that whipping left hook to the jaw early in Round 2, you just knew it was over. Two more knockdowns in that session and Inoue was a three-weight world titleholder and the new Ring Magazine champion at 118 pounds.

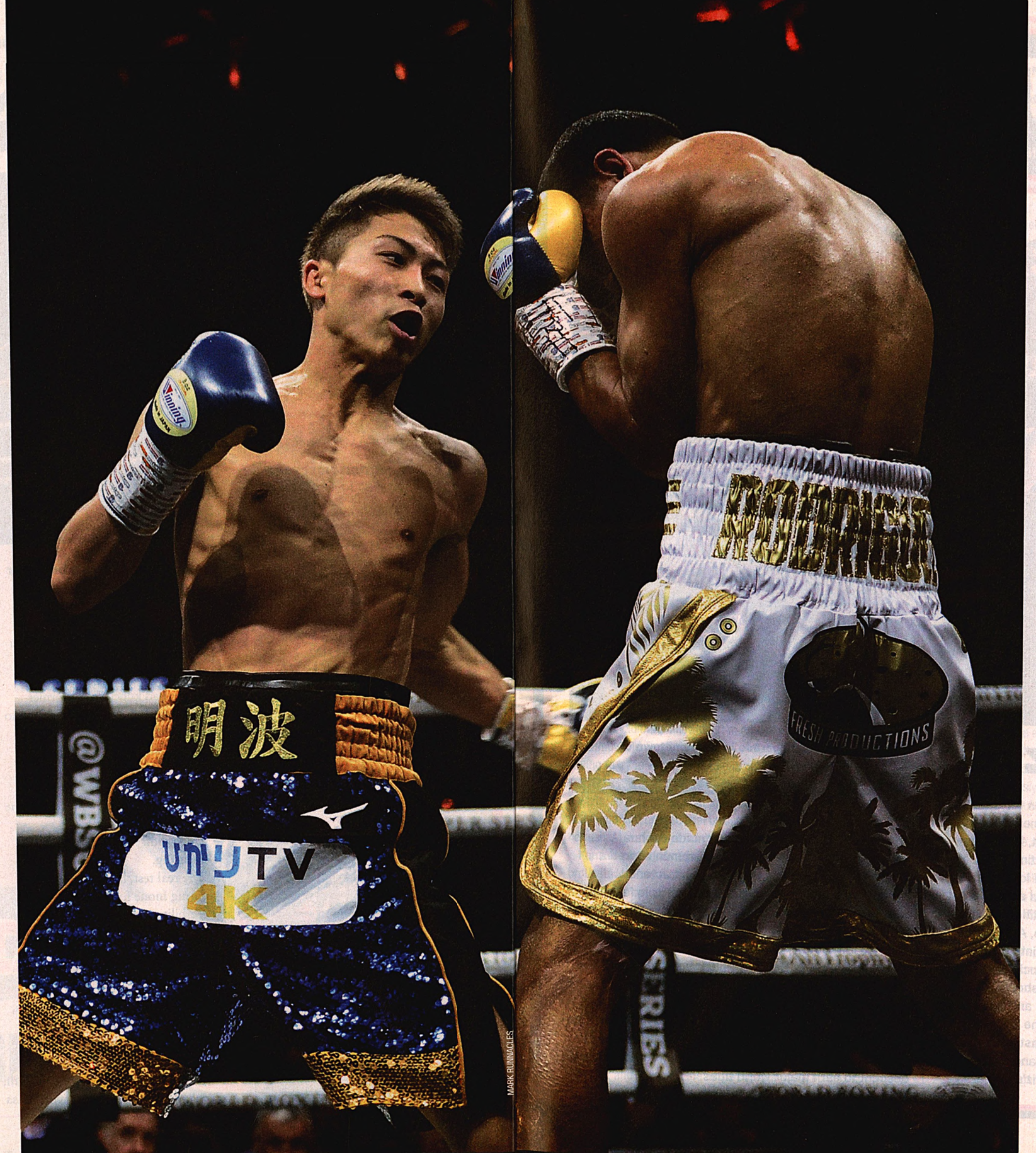
"Inoue is never gonna be hotter than he is right now."

When I reminded Doug I'd said that prior to the previous cover story, he laughed. In truth, I should have known better. Inoue is so special, and his best nights probably still lie ahead of him. For now, we have a second cover story, and this one will allow a whole raft of fighters, trainers and boxing insiders to offer their opinions on the pound-for-pound star. All of them were more than happy to contribute.

The artwork was designed by George Morikawa, an acclaimed manga author best known for his work on the boxing-themed *Hajime no Ippo*, which was later adapted into a hugely popular anime television series. Everyone at The Ring would like to thank George for this sensational and unique piece of art, which we believe retains the timeless quality of this publication's most classic covers. A huge thanks must once again go to Masa, who put us in contact with George.

Next up for Inoue is the WBSS final against Donaire (subject of our "Greatest Hits" feature on Page 56). As you'll soon discover, "The Filipino Flash" is relishing the prospect of derailing "The Monster" – the man who is arguably the most fearsome fighter in boxing today.

Tom Gray, Associate Editor, Ring Magazine



MARK RUNNACLES

Inoue's left hook and body attack proved too much for Emmanuel Rodriguez, who was bewildered and overpowered in Round 2 of their WBSS semifinal.

ROUND 1

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH ★ NEW FACES ★ AND MORE!

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

ANDY RUIZ JR.

Ruiz was treated to a parade in his hometown of Imperial, California.

It was easy to root for Andy Ruiz Jr. when the affable slugger signed on as a late-notice opponent for Anthony Joshua's anticipated U.S. debut, but it was hard to give him a realistic shot at upsetting the British star on June 1. Joshua didn't just look the part of a heavyweight juggernaut, he had earned his No. 1 status by unifying three world titles and defeating the likes of Wladimir Klitschko, Alexander Povetkin and Joseph Parker, who outpointed Ruiz in December 2016. However, Ruiz (as much as a 20-to-1 underdog according to some sportsbooks) had drastically improved since his lone loss, and despite weighing in at a very soft 268 pounds, the 29-year-old Californian displayed the quicker feet, faster hands and fiercer combinations once the bell rang for the Madison Square Garden main event. Ruiz's aggressive style and bold confidence clearly made Joshua uncomfortable, even after the Englishman scored a third-round knockdown. Joshua uncharacteristically rushed in for the kill once Ruiz made it to his feet and was soon clipped by a hook that he never recovered from. Ruiz scored four knockdowns (two in Round 3 and two in Round 7) before Joshua was deemed unfit to continue. A note to Deontay Wilder and Luis Ortiz: See what happens when you roll the dice? You can score a career-defining/life-altering victory. Ruiz (33-1, 22 KOs), who is set to rematch Joshua in the fall, is now the hottest thing in boxing – a new player in the sport's glamour division and the first heavyweight of Mexican descent to earn major world titles. RING

Madrimov rips Norberto Gonzalez with a hook to the body on his way to a sixth-round stoppage on the Golovkin-Rolls undercard on June 8.

SARAH STIER/GETTY IMAGES

NEW FACES

ISRAIL MADRIMOV

By Anson Wainwright

Every now and then, a boxer comes along who catches your eye with the potential to become the next big thing. Last November, junior middleweight Israil Madrimov did just that.

Fighting on the undercard of Dmitry Bivol vs. Jean Pascal in Atlantic City, the former amateur standout made his pro debut by stopping Vladimir Hernandez in six rounds. It was a scheduled 10-rounder. He followed that in March with an even more impressive display, knocking out the vastly more experienced Frank Rojas (24-2) in two rounds.

Not one to relax, the 24-year-old power-puncher from Uzbekistan insisted on moving his career quickly, and three months later he was fighting underneath Gennady Golovkin vs. Steve Rolls at Madison Square Garden, where Madrimov stopped Mexican veteran Norberto Gonzalez in the sixth frame of a scheduled 10-rounder.

"When we first met and agreed to work together, I told my manager, Vadim Kornilov, that I'm ready for any type of challenge," Madrimov told The Ring through co-manager Alik Frolov. "I was willing to try to win a world title in my first fight.

"Vadim and Alik were following me and my (amateur) career for a while, so they knew what to expect from me, but they were still telling me that professional boxing is a different world and there is no rush. At that time, I didn't know how it works."

Kornilov placed Madrimov in the tried-and-tested hands of brothers Joel and Antonio Diaz in Indio, California. Joel Diaz feels that despite having only three professional fights, Madrimov is already a top-tier prospect.

"Israil is among the best fighters because of his style and his confidence," said Diaz. "His style is very unique; it works for him. He works in angles, he throws punches you least expect, and honestly he can become one of the best fighters of this era. He is going to generate a lot of attention just with his ability and his punching power.

"He throws punches like nothing I've seen – maybe only (Manny) Pacquiao. He has a good power punch with his left and his right, and based on the angle he's standing, he kills it – a good punch – and any of them could hurt you, because you will not see it coming."

Madrimov has several of his former Uzbekistani amateur teammates in Southern California for company, making the unlikely location feel like a small corner of his homeland.

"I really love to train here in Indio," said Madrimov. "Our team, we are like a family: me, Bakhodir Jalolov, Bektemir Melikuziev, Shakhram Giyasov and Murodjon Akhmadaliev. We were together since kids, and now we are here together in the United States. It sounds unbelievable, but it's a true story."

A far cry from his humble beginnings in Khiva, a small city near the border with Turkmenistan. His family was poor and he dreamed of a better life.

"All I remember is doing different sports since I was a little kid at 8," Madrimov explained. "I started doing gymnastics and judo. I went to the boxing section when I was 9 – it was a sports boarding school. I also did table tennis and soccer, just for agility and different types of skills that helped me to grow as a boxer.

Madrimov had 330 amateur fights, losing approximately 15-20, and counts six national titles among his many awards. He feels that as a professional he can fight anywhere from welterweight to middleweight with success.

"I feel very comfortable at 154 pounds," he said. "Obviously I'm a small 154-pounder (he's 5-foot-8½), but because of my amateur experience I fought (at) 165 (pounds) and I'm used to dealing with the bigger guys. There is always the possibility to move down to 147 or to move up to 160 for a big fight."

His three outings in the professional ranks have caught the eye of DAZN color commentator Sergio Mora, who knows a thing or two about reaching the top of the junior middleweight division, having held the WBC title a decade ago.

The winner of the first season of *The Contender* rates Madrimov among the best prospects in boxing.

"He's ridiculously talented," Mora said. "That KO against Rojas was scary. I think Madrimov and (2016 Olympic gold medalist Daniyar) Yeleussinov are incredible talents and being moved quickly because of it. The difference is Madrimov is a wicked body-puncher. I see Madrimov reaching his dream even faster than other gifted Olympians like Yeleussinov."

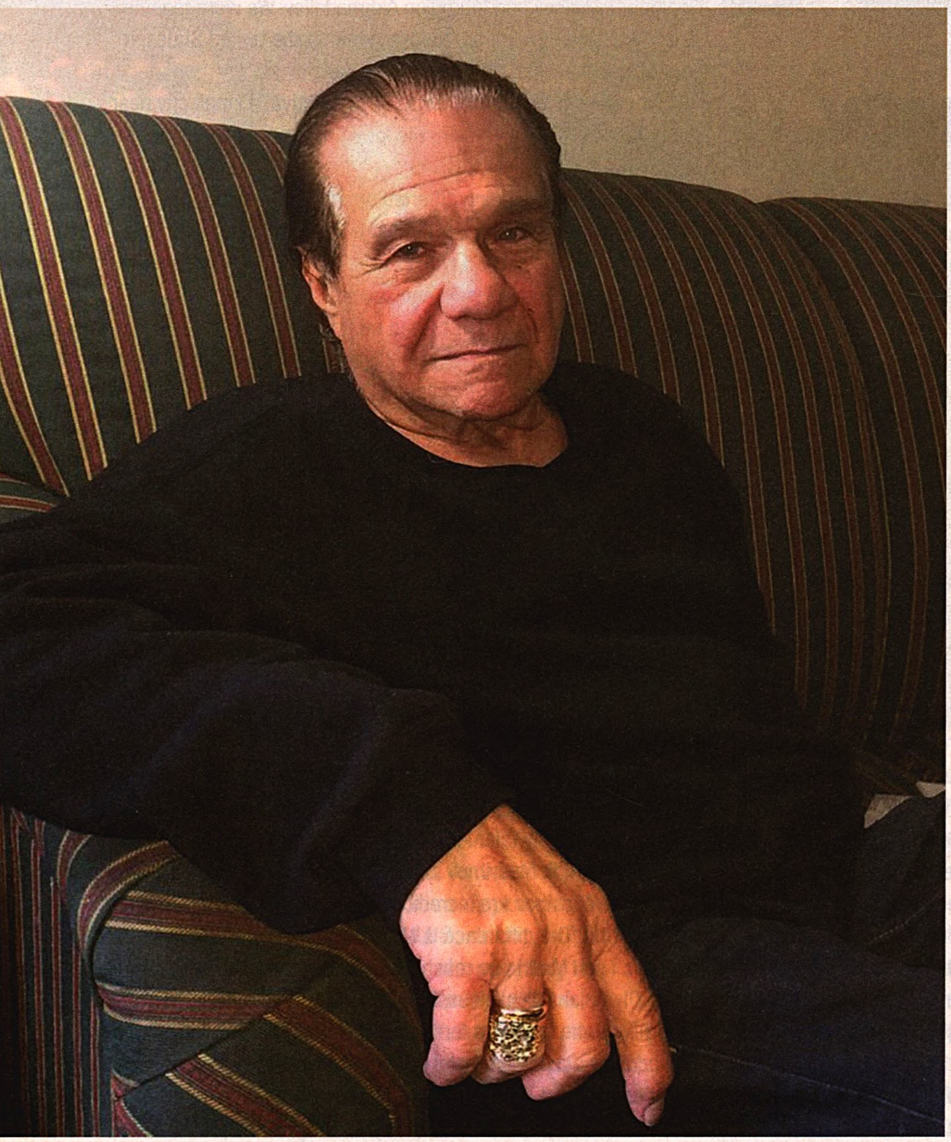
Kornilov, who is known for his work with Dmitry Bivol, Ruslan Provodnikov and Viktor Postol, among others, has high hopes for his latest star.

"Israil is a very special boxer, very exciting, full of power and intensity," said Kornilov. "I think he is another fighter on our team that will really move quickly and make a statement similar to Dmitry Bivol." RING

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER



DON ELBAUM: NO REGRETS FROM THIS BOXING LIFER

Few have experienced boxing as completely as Elbaum, who promoted his first fight card as a teenager and continues to hustle in the business.

"Don Elbaum," Jerry Izenberg once wrote, "lives on nerve and hustle and dreams he will never realize."

Elbaum, a 2019 inductee into the International Boxing Hall of Fame, has spent his life in boxing as a promoter, matchmaker, manager, and jack-of-all-trades. He has been referred to as "a low-grade hustler who's too low to grade" and "a charming rogue without the charm." That's by people who like him.

Elbaum gave Don King his start in the sweet science. He has connived with referees and judges and once planned to promote fights in Nevada at an upscale brothel called Sherry's Ranch. "Bordello Boxing" (as the venture was known) failed to get off the ground when the Nevada state legislature put its foot down.

The most famous tale involving Elbaum dates to 1965. Sugar Ray Robinson was nearing the end of his glorious ring career and readying to fight Peter Schmidt in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. The media was invited to a publicity dinner.

"I looked around for the two most battered boxing gloves I could find," Elbaum (who promoted the bout) later recalled. "The highlight of the evening was when I got up and said, 'Ray, don't ask me how I got these. But 25 years ago, you made your professional debut at Madison Square Garden, and these are the gloves you wore in that fight.' Ray's eyes actually teared up. He was genuinely moved by the moment. He took the gloves and cradled them in his arms like he was holding a newborn babe."

Then someone suggested that Robinson put the gloves on for a photo op. That was when the world discovered that Don Elbaum had given Sugar Ray Robinson two

left gloves.

"I love boxing," Elbaum told me years ago. "I've given my life to boxing. It's the reason I've been broke, in jail, lived out of crummy motel rooms. You name it, and boxing has done it to me. But if I had my life to live over again, I'd do it all the same way. Boxing is in my blood. It's a beautiful sickness."

So . . . With that as background, it's worth recounting a telephone call I received recently from Elbaum.

"I gotta tell you this," Don proclaimed. "It's a classic. I was on a train yesterday going from Philadelphia to Providence. I was reading the New York Times magazine section. It had a big article about Glenda Jackson playing King Lear. *King Lear* is a great play. I think Shakespeare wrote it. And Glenda Jackson was on the magazine cover.

"Anyway," Elbaum continued, "there was this woman sitting across the aisle from me. I'm guessing she was in her sixties. I glanced over at her. We made eye contact. And then she said to me, 'It's so nice to be sitting across the aisle from an intellectual.'"

★★★

Adam Pollack lives in Iowa. By last count, according to BoxRec.com, he has refereed 63 professional fights and been a judge at ringside for 58 more. He has never refereed a major bout. But he has a unique distinction that separates him from other third men in the ring: Pollack has written critically acclaimed biographies of every gloved champion from John. L. Sullivan through Jack Johnson.

Pollack is a graduate of the University of Iowa College of Law. After working as a prosecutor with the Johnson County Attorney's Office in Iowa City, he opened a private practice as a criminal defense attorney. He boxed as an amateur while in law school and began refereeing and judging amateur bouts in the 1990s. Then he took a hiatus from officiating to coach, manage and promote. One of his fighters advanced to the semifinals of the men's National Golden Gloves. A female charge won multiple national and international amateur championships. These are good credentials considering the limited talent pool in Iowa.

The most noteworthy fight that Pollack has refereed to date is the July 20, 2018, contest between Thomas Mattice and Zhora Hamazaryan in Sloan, Iowa. Showtime televised the bout nationally. Mattice was awarded a dreadful decision that sparked widespread outrage. But no one complained about the refereeing.

Quite a few referees have written books. Almost always, it's one and done, and the books are memoirs that focus on the author. Pollack has chronicled the lives of John L. Sullivan, James Corbett, Bob Fitzsimmons, James Jeffries, Marvin Hart, Tommy Burns and Jack Johnson in detail, scouring old newspapers and other primary sources for material to construct his narratives.

As for his philosophy of refereeing, Pollack says, "It's not about me. It's about the fighters. The best referees are the ones you almost never notice. If people walk out of the arena talking about the referee, chances are I've done something wrong.

"I try to be old-school in my officiating," Pollack continues. "You want to stay out of the way. But you have to position yourself so you can see what's happening and jump in to stop a fight on a moment's notice. My general style is hands off, let the fighters fight. I don't get involved unless I'm forced to. My biggest pet peeve in officiating is referees who don't allow boxers to work on the inside and break the fighters too soon. That has a greater impact on the outcome of a fight than many people realize. Clinching and infighting are part of the sport. If one boxer is holding incessantly with a vice grip, the fighters should be broken and, eventually, points should be taken if the tactic is creating an unfair advantage and ruining the flow of the fight. But there are times when you see a fighter do a lot of work to get inside. He gets held. And instead of allowing the aggressor to work free and land punches, the referee breaks them and physically pushes the aggressor back. That gives the fighter doing the holding a break and forces the infighter to have to work to get back inside again.

"And another complaint I have," Pollack notes, "is referees who take too much time to decide whether a fight should continue or be stopped after a knockdown. A good referee can make a determination within several seconds of concluding the count. You're supposed to be assessing the fighter during the count. Taking 20 seconds after a knockdown to make a decision gives one fighter extra recovery time and penalizes the opposing fighter who wants to finish off his opponent. And it can be used as an excuse to not stop a fight that needs to be stopped."

Have Pollack's different roles in boxing influenced his work as a writer?

"It's all intertwined," he acknowledges. "The fact that I've refereed, judged, coached and even fought a bit helps me see things from a number of different perspectives."

And suppose he were able to go back in time and referee one of the early fights that he has written about?

"I'd love it," Pollack answers. "It would be great to be in the ring with John L. Sullivan, James Corbett, Bob Fitzsimmons, all of the early champions to see how good they were and how hard they hit." RING

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – Protect Yourself at All Times – was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism.

BERNARD HOPKINS: STAREDOWN

THE FACE OF BOXING

PHOTOGRAPHS BY WOJTEK URBANEK ★ TEXT BY THOMAS HAUSER

Few people in boxing make a point more dramatically in or out of the ring than Bernard Hopkins. For three decades, he has confounded critics and defied expectations, inventing and reinventing himself time and again.

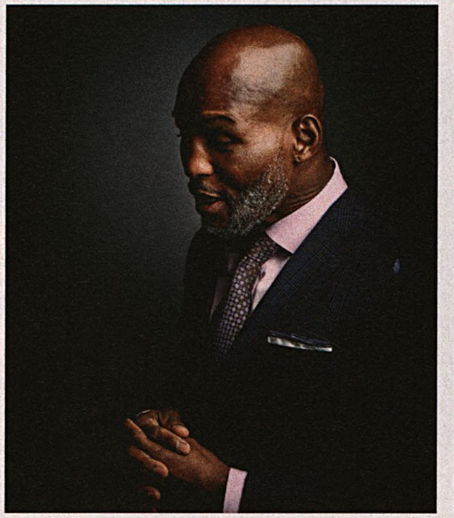
Unknown club fighter with an 0-1 ring record ... Prospect ... Contender ... Beltholder ... Legitimate champion ... Ageless wonder with Hall of Fame credentials ... The Executioner ... The Alien ... B-Hop ... Bernard has played all of these roles.

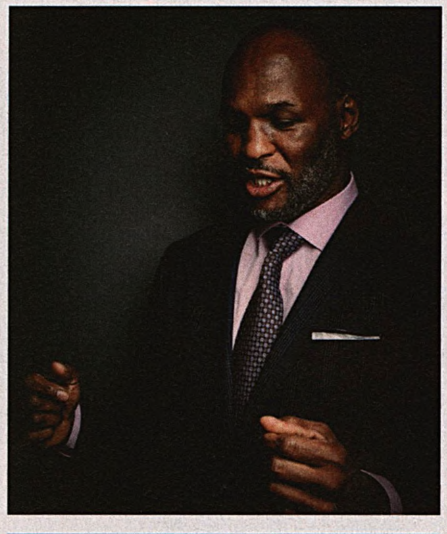
Hopkins agreed to pose for Wojtek Urbanek at the annual Boxing Writers Association of America dinner. But before facing the camera, Bernard wanted to share some thoughts with me. Quite a few thoughts, actually. Words of wisdom like, "Anybody I fucked deserved it," and, "I don't want to be a businessman; I want to be a business."

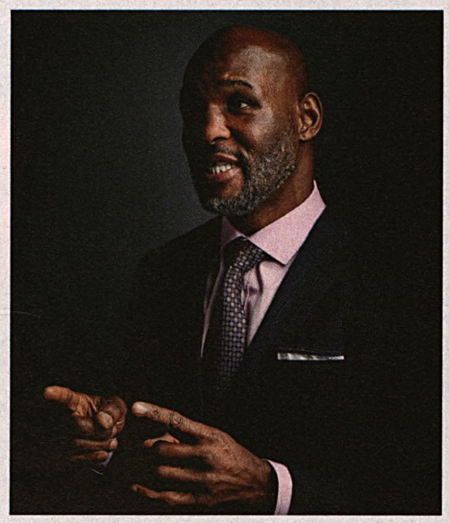
Bernard lectured nonstop for a good 20 minutes, often gesturing forcefully with his hands. At one juncture, to emphasize a point, he suggested that we simulate a pre-fight staredown.

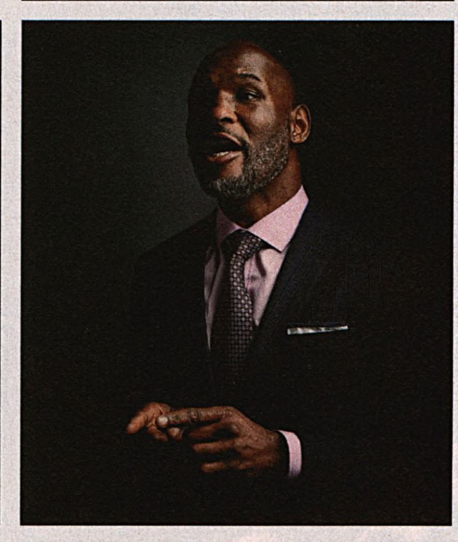
"I'm watching this," Urbanek recalls. "And I said to myself, 'I have to capture this. Something important is going on here.'"

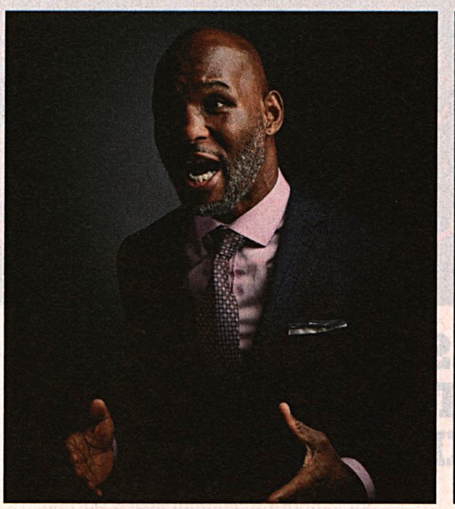
"Bernard is an amazing person," Wojtek adds. "He sees the big picture of things, although very often he is in the center of the picture." RING

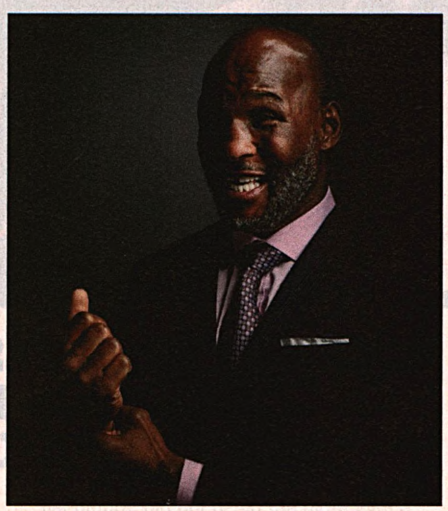












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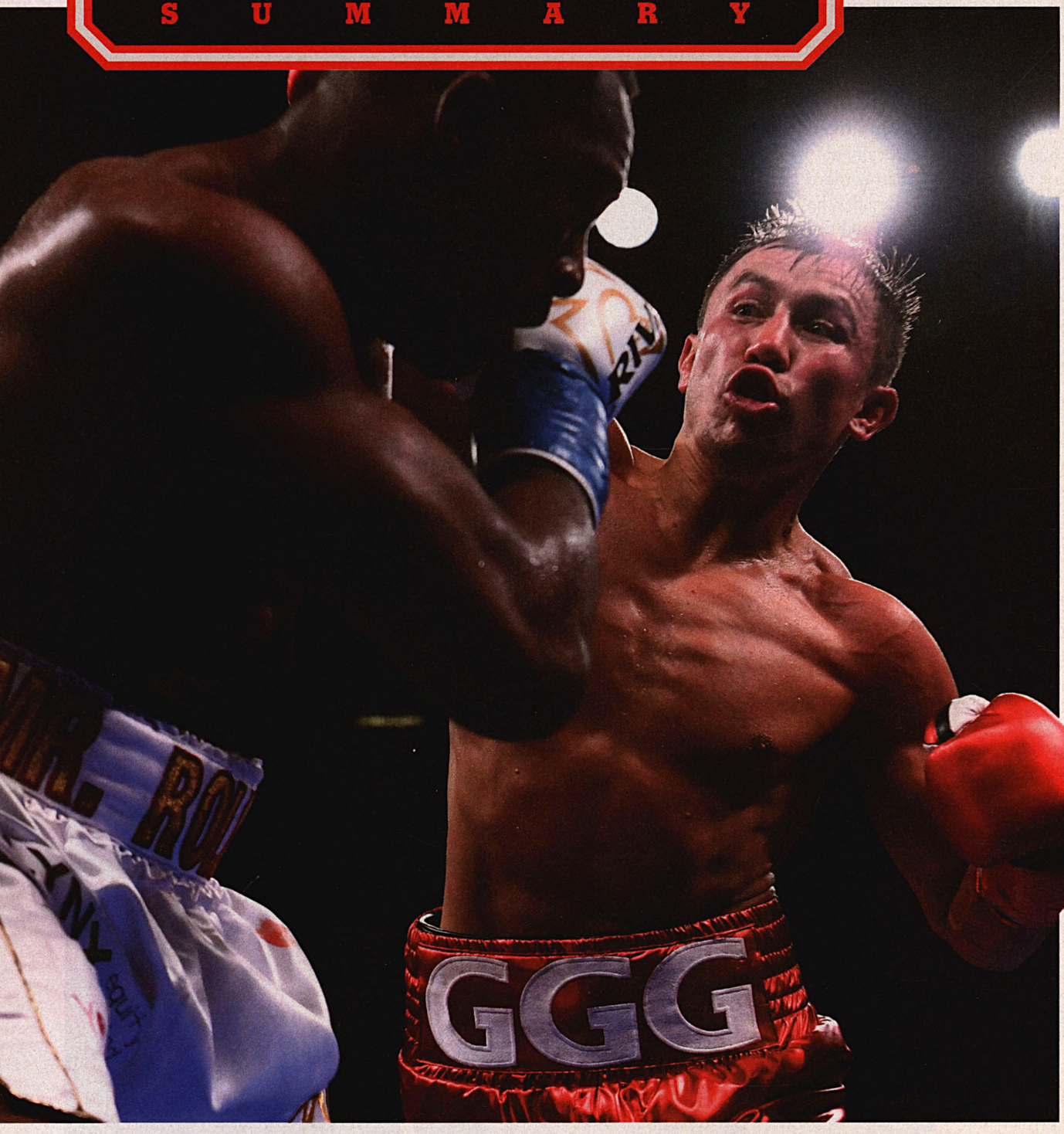
RATINGS SUMMARY

THE RING RATINGS THROUGH FIGHTS OF JUNE 22, 2019



RECENT FIGHT RESULTS AND CHANGES IN THE RING'S DIVISIONAL RANKINGS

BY **BRIAN HARTY**

The Big Drama Show returned to Madison Square Garden with Gennadiy Golovkin's fourth-round KO of unrated middleweight Steve Rolls on June 8.

POUND FOR POUND

Nobody was more thankful for Andy Ruiz Jr.'s spectacular upset of Anthony Joshua than the people tasked with promoting Gennadiy Golovkin's fight on June 8. Suddenly here was an angle to sell what was essentially a "welcome to DAZN" party complete with a $100 million cake and a piñata named Steve Rolls, an obscure Canadian who had only graduated from eight-rounders his last time out: Could Rolls pull a Ruiz and shock the world?

He couldn't, it turns out, but he gave it his best shot. The underdog proved to be more resilient than many thought, deflecting Golovkin's attacks and scoring enough with his own to win the second round on one judge's card. Of course Golovkin, who was fighting under trainer Johnathon Banks for the first time, didn't seem concerned by Rolls' power and could've been taking his time as he tried some stuff out; his fixation on body shots was especially nasty. Rolls did well to last more than 10 minutes, but the inevitable caught up in the fourth round when a left dropped on his forehead from above (a downercut?) and stunned him, at which point a voice commanding "Finish him!" would've felt right. A left hook took care of that. It was more drama show than expected, but no effect on the ratings; the most consequential thing to happen that night was Golovkin officially adding an "i" to his first name.

HEAVYWEIGHTS

It's not difficult to look back now and say it made some sense, that Ruiz was more skilled than most, the size difference was too tricky and the composition of Joshua's chin was not well understood, but there was an atmosphere of absolute certainty in Madison Square Garden before the fight on June 1. The only thing needed was a number: Joshua KO (insert round here).

People said it was win-win for Ruiz, but when you hear that expression applied to professional athletes, it's always worth recalling the boast often heard in the late 1980s: "Hell, I'd take a punch from Mike Tyson for a million bucks." First, no you wouldn't. And second, the money wouldn't make it any less damaging. For Ruiz, losing the way he was expected to lose would only confirm that he's not part of the club – he'd climbed as high as he could and it wasn't high enough, so now he could get comfortable on the second tier while Joshua, Deontay Wilder and Tyson Fury got back to their big-boy games. That's not a "win" for somebody trying to be a heavyweight champion. But Ruiz shouldn't actually expect to win, right? Just look at him. In case you didn't notice or hear the endless chatter insisting that you notice: He's tubby!

That tattooed cherub can fight, though. Joshua almost looked embarrassed by his own physique, like he was picking on a kid, but he should've been focused on Ruiz's less tangible attributes, the most important of which might've been his ability to take a punch. For his own offense, all four of the knockdowns Ruiz scored involved swarms of punches, and the type depended on what he needed at the time – hooks at close range, lead left hooks from a distance, javelin right crosses or other clubbing but accurate rights. All were made possible by fast hands, nimble feet and the agile brain behind them; Ruiz played it beautifully.

The question for the Ring ratings panel was what to make of this. Joshua had gone into the fight as the No. 1-rated heavyweight while Ruiz, though he'd dipped his toe in at the bottom of the list before, did not begin the night with a

Andy Ruiz Jr. dramatically re-entered the heavyweight rankings after an 18-month absence by unseating No. 1-rated Anthony Joshua with a seventh-round stoppage.

Jesse Hart celebrates a unanimous decision over Sullivan Barrera in his light heavyweight debut, a victory that earned him a No. 8 ranking.

ranking. Track records were a heavy factor in the determination of No. 3 for the new unified titleholder. And, while employing hindsight and straying outside the ratings as they were, there was at least some feeling that, among the former top three (Joshua, Fury and Wilder), Joshua was the one most vulnerable to Ruiz's style. Wilder hits harder and Fury boxes better. Not everyone agreed, though. Panelist Adam Abramowitz countered, "So you knock out the No. 1 guy – no close points win, no controversy – and you are somehow only No. 3? Yeah, not seeing that. No. 1 for me."

Two weeks later, Ruiz's triumph was invoked yet again to boost viewership for another public sacrifice: Fury vs. Tom Schwarz. It wasn't really needed in this case, though. Fury channeling Apollo Creed's "Living in America" walk-in was bold, considering what happened to Creed, but the "Gypsy King" knows how to put on a show. His performance in the ring was just as flashy, as he quickly and intelligently dismantled his German foe for a second-round stoppage. No effect on the ratings.

CRUISERWEIGHTS

Maksim Vlasov (No. 7 last month) moved down to light heavyweight, so his removal created a spot at No. 10 for Lawrence Okolie, who represented the U.K. at the 2016 Olympics and has moved aggressively as a pro, putting together a 12-0 (9 KOs) record. The ratings panel also considered Belgium's Yves Ngabu for the spot but gave it to Okolie because "he fights much more often and seems to have a higher upside."

Krzysztof Glowacki dropped from No. 4 to No. 5 after losing by third-round TKO to Mairis Briedis (who remained at No. 1 and captured the WBO title) in a World Boxing Super Series semifinal in Briedis' hometown of Riga, Latvia. It was only a one-notch drop because of the lawless nature of the fight, in which Glowacki took an elbow to the jaw after a break and then later was knocked down several seconds after a bell – unheard by referee Robert Byrd – had ended the second round. … In the other semifinal, No. 3-rated Yunier Dorticos won the vacant IBF title with a 10th-round knockout of Andrew Tabiti, who might've thought he was countering a simple jab but instead leaned into the second half of a devastating one-two. The American, who was still on the canvas long after the fight ended, dropped from No. 6 to No. 8 on the list, but Dorticos held his position underneath Murat Gassiev, who TKO'd the Cuban in early 2018.

Both by virtue of Tabiti's drop and his own victory, Ilunga Makabu advanced from No. 8 to No. 7 after stopping Dmitry Kudryashov (unrated) in a five-round hammer-fest.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS

Joshua Buatsi drew the label of "best prospect at 175" from one panel member after his fourth-round stoppage of Marco Antonio Periban.

Jesse Hart (unrated last month) bounced back from his loss to Gilberto Ramirez at super middleweight with a unanimous decision over Sullivan Barrera (No. 8). Hart took the No. 8 spot and it was suggested that Barrera should drop out in favor of keeping Anthony Yarde at No. 10, but that idea was nixed on the basis of resumes. "Let Yarde earn his way back by beating someone of note," said the outspoken Abramowitz. And so it came to pass: Yarde was out, Barrera slipped to No. 9 and Sven Fornling went from No. 9 to No. 10.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS

Hassan N'Dam (No. 9 middleweight last month) went all in for his move to 168, but neither his courage nor his legendary ability to get up from knockdowns was enough to save him from Callum Smith, who won by third-round TKO to defend his champion status. It's a little terrifying how Smith destroys people while looking like he could fall asleep at any moment.

Kazakhstani prospect Ali Akhmedov (unrated) looked good in stopping Marcus McDaniel (unrated) in three rounds – a performance also notable because it was Max Golovkin's (Gennady's twin brother) debut as a head trainer. Ring-cutting know-how clearly runs in the family.

With Hart (No. 9 last month) moving up to 175, a spot opened up at No. 10 and was taken by Avni Yildirim.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS

N'Dam's departure left room at No. 10 for the return of Ryota Murata, who is set to take on Rob Brant in a rematch on July 12. … Golovkin's win over Rolls had no effect on the list.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS

The action here took place only on the fringes: 30-somethings Austin Trout and Terrell Gausha fought to a draw, Israil Madrimov stopped Norberto Gonzalez in six rounds (Madrimov "looks like a beast despite only three fights," said one panel member. "It won't be long before he cracks the top 10.") and undefeated Sergio Garcia defended his European title with a wide decision over Siarhei Rabchanka to stay "in the 11-15 range."

WELTERWEIGHTS

Ray Robinson (unrated) notched his second-straight draw but established himself as a "heck of a gatekeeper at 147" by tarnishing the record of British Olympian Josh Kelly.

Despite his vaunted heart and durability, Hassan N'Dam was no match for the size, power and punch accuracy of 168-pound Ring champ Callum Smith.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS

No changes.

LIGHTWEIGHTS

Devin Haney (No. 6 last month) is not the guy you want teaching a "how to keep your hands up" class, but he makes up for his flawed Mayweather impression with a formidable mix of speed, timing and accuracy. And at 20 years old, he's still developing. "There were rumors I didn't have punching power," he said after flattening Antonio Moran (unrated) with a decidedly powerful overhand right. Haney rose to No. 4 as a result.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS

Jamel Herring crashed into the ratings at No. 4 after outboxing Masayuki Ito (who dropped from No. 4 to No. 7) to take the WBO title (more on Herring's story later in this issue). His arrival pushed No. 10-rated Alberto Machado off the list.

Things got even worse for Machado when he lost his rematch with Andrew Cancio by third-round knockout, which was one round fewer than it took Cancio to do the same in February. The panel didn't see a strong separation between Cancio's No. 5

Chinese standout Xu Can advanced in the featherweight rankings with a sixth-round stoppage of former 122-pound contender Shun Kubo.

rating and Herring's No. 4, but the decision was made to swap them because when comparing the fighters responsible for their losses, the quality of opposition comes out slightly in favor of Cancio.

FEATHERWEIGHTS

Xu Can (No. 7 last month) gained a notch by stopping former 122-pound contender Shun Kubo (unrated). … Oscar Valdez held onto his WBO belt and his No. 4 spot with a unanimous decision over unrated Jason Sanchez.

Josh Warrington's usual fire was effectively doused by Kid Galahad's awkward style, but the cards went in favor of the titleholder by split decision. Panel members were divided as well: "I felt Kid Galahad did enough to win," said Anson Wainwright. "His style will always be a difficult one for Warrington." Martin Mulcahey disagreed: "I thought Josh Warrington was the rightful if ugly winner against Galahad. Ingle boxers are just a nightmare (in good and bad way)." Tom Gray agreed from a firsthand perspective: "Along with the vast majority of ringsiders, I felt Warrington legitimately retained his title." The sidebar of the debate was whether to drop Warrington (No. 2) below Gary Russell Jr. (No. 3), who some feel would win if the pair faced each other. Russell's bane – lack of activity – hurt him, though, and the positions remained as they were. Galahad was lowered from No. 9 to No. 10.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS

No changes.

BANTAMWEIGHTS

No changes.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS

Kazuto Ioka (No. 5 last month) rebounded from his split-decision loss to then-titleholder Donnie Nietes and claimed the vacant WBO belt with a 10th-round stoppage of No. 8-rated Aston Palicte. Mulcahey: "Both of Ioka's losses were by split decision and he looked fantastic again facing a bigger foe who did well against Nietes." Ioka was raised to No. 4 and Palicte fell to No. 10.

FLYWEIGHTS

Sho Kimura (No. 6 last month) was removed, as he dropped down in weight, and No. 10 went to undefeated 21-year-old Junto Nakatani. … Artem Dalakian held his spot at No. 3 after defending his title with a 10th-round stoppage of Sarawut Thawornkham (unrated).

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS

Kimura unfortunately kicked off his move to 108 with a UD loss to Carlos Canizales (No. 4 at the time), but it was good enough to get him a spot at No. 9, which pushed Jonathan Taconing out. Canizales rose to No. 3. … Hiroto Kyoguchi ("another in this line of Japanese golden generation taking on foes so early in their careers") made the first defense of his Ring and WBA belts with a wide decision over unrated Tanawat Nakoon. … Angel Acosta was knocked out in the 12th round by unheralded Mexican Elwin Soto, who took Acosta's WBO belt and his No. 5 rank, pushing the stunned Puerto Rican down to No. 6.

STRAWWEIGHTS

Wanheng Menayothin (No. 2 last month) retained his WBC belt for the 11th time with an eight-round technical decision over former titleholder Tatsuya Fukuhara (No. 8). Yes, he takes the occasional six-round tuneup against a no-hoper and he never leaves Thailand, but that shouldn't stop you from pulling up his BoxRec page when somebody brings up the 50-0 thing. Menayothin, aka Chayaphon Moonsri, is now 53-0.

RATINGS

THE RING RATINGS THROUGH FIGHTS OF JUNE 22, 2019

Golovkin held his lofty spots in the middleweight and pound-for-pound rankings with his rust-shaking win over Rolls.

1 VASILIY LOMACHENKO
Ukraine • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)

2 TERENCE CRAWFORD
U.S. • 35-0-0 (26 KOs)

3 CANELO ALVAREZ
Mexico • 52-1-2 (35 KOs)

4 NAOYA INOUE
Japan • 18-0-0 (16 KOs)

5 ALEKSANDR USYK
Ukraine • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)

6 ERROL SPENCE JR.
U.S. • 25-0-0 (21 KOs)

7 GENNADIY GOLOVKIN
Kazakhstan • 39-1-1 (35 KOs)

8 JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA
Mexico • 39-3-0 (26 KOs)

9 MIKEY GARCIA
U.S. • 39-1-0 (30 KOs)

10 DONNIE NIETES
Philippines • 42-1-5 (23 KOs)

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C (VACANT)

1 TYSON FURY
U.K. • 28-0-1 (20 KOs)

2 DEONTAY WILDER
U.S. • 41-0-1 (40 KOs)

3 ANDY RUIZ JR.
U.S. • 33-1-0 (22 KOs)

4 ANTHONY JOSHUA
U.K. • 22-1-0 (21 KOs)

5 DILLIAN WHYTE
U.K. • 25-1-0 (18 KOs)

6 LUIS ORTIZ
Cuba • 31-1-0 (26 KOs)

7 ALEXANDER POVETKIN
Russia • 34-2-0 (24 KOs)

8 JOSEPH PARKER
New Zealand • 25-2-0 (19 KOs)

9 ADAM KOWNACKI
U.S. • 19-0-0 (15 KOs)

10 KUBRAT PULEV
Bulgaria • 27-1-0 (14 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

C ALEKSANDR USYK
Ukraine • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)

1 MAIRIS BRIEDIS
Latvia • 26-1-0 (19 KOs)

2 MURAT GASSIEV
Russia • 26-1-0 (19 KOs)

3 YUNIER DORTICOS
Cuba • 24-1-0 (22 KOs)

4 DENIS LEBEDEV
Russia • 32-2-0 (23 KOs)

5 KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI
Poland • 31-2-0 (19 KOs)

6 KEVIN LERENA
S. Africa • 23-1-0 (10 KOs)

7 ILUNGA MAKABU
Congo • 25-2-0 (24 KOs)

8 ANDREW TABITI
U.S. • 17-1-0 (13 KOs)

9 ARSEN GOULAMIRIAN
France • 24-0-0 (16 KOs)

10 LAWRENCE OKOLIE
U.K. • 12-0-0 (9 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

C (VACANT)

1 OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK
Ukraine • 17-0-0 (14 KOs)

2 SERGEY KOVALEV
Russia • 33-3-1 (28 KOs)

3 DMITRY BIVOL
Russia • 16-0-0 (11 KOs)

4 ARTUR BETERBIEV
Russia • 14-0-0 (14 KOs)

5 MARCUS BROWNE
U.S. • 23-0-0 (16 KOs)

6 ELEIDER ALVAREZ
Colombia • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)

7 BADOU JACK
Sweden • 22-2-3 (13 KOs)

8 JESSE HART
U.S. • 26-2-0 (21 KOs)

9 SULLIVAN BARRERA
Cuba • 22-3-0 (14 KOs)

10 SVEN FORNLING
Sweden • 15-1-0 (7 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C CALLUM SMITH
U.K. • 26-0-0 (19 KOs)

1 GILBERTO RAMIREZ
Mexico • 40-0-0 (26 KOs)

2 DAVID BENAVIDEZ
U.S. • 21-0-0 (18 KOs)

3 CALEB PLANT
U.S. • 18-0-0 (10 KOs)

4 ANTHONY DIRRELL
U.S. • 33-1-1 (24 KOs)

5 CANELO ALVAREZ
Mexico • 52-1-2 (35 KOs)

6 CHRIS EUBANK JR.
U.K. • 28-2-0 (21 KOs)

7 JOSE UZCATEGUI
Venezuela • 28-3-0 (23 KOs)

8 CALEB TRUAX
U.S. • 30-4-2 (19 KOs)

9 BILLY JOE SAUNDERS
U.K. • 28-0-0 (13 KOs)

10 AVNI YILDIRIM
Turkey • 21-2-0 (12 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights of June 22, 2019

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C **CANELO ALVAREZ**
Mexico • 52-1-2 (35 KOs)

1 **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN**
Kaz. • 39-1-1 (35 KOs)

2 **DANIEL JACOBS**
U.S. • 35-3-0 (29 KOs)

3 **ROB BRANT**
U.S. • 25-1-0 (17 KOs)

4 **DEMETRIUS ANDRADE**
U.S. • 27-0-0 (17 KOs)

5 **JERMALL CHARLO**
U.S. • 28-0-0 (21 KOs)

6 **SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO**
Ukraine • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)

7 **DAVID LEMIEUX**
Canada • 40-4-0 (34 KOs)

8 **MACIEJ SULECKI**
Poland • 28-1-0 (11 KOs)

9 **KAMIL SZEREMETA**
Poland • 19-0-0 (4 KOs)

10 **RYOTA MURATA**
Japan • 14-2-0 (11 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **JULIAN WILLIAMS**
U.S. • 27-1-1 (16 KOs)

2 **JARRETT HURD**
U.S. • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)

3 **ERISLANDY LARA**
Cuba • 25-3-3 (14 KOs)

4 **JAIME MUNGUIA**
Mexico • 33-0-0 (26 KOs)

5 **BRIAN CASTANO**
Argentina • 15-0-1 (11 KOs)

6 **TONY HARRISON**
U.S. • 28-2-0 (21 KOs)

7 **JERMELL CHARLO**
U.S. • 31-1-0 (15 KOs)

8 **MICHEL SORO**
France • 33-2-1 (22 KOs)

9 **KELL BROOK**
U.K. • 38-2-0 (26 KOs)

10 **ERICKSON LUBIN**
U.S. • 20-1-0 (15 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **ERROL SPENCE JR.**
U.S. • 25-0-0 (21 KOs)

2 **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
U.S. • 35-0-0 (26 KOs)

3 **KEITH THURMAN**
U.S. • 29-0-0 (22 KOs)

4 **SHAWN PORTER**
U.S. • 30-2-1 (17 KOs)

5 **MANNY PACQUIAO**
Phil. • 61-7-2 (39 KOs)

6 **DANNY GARCIA**
U.S. • 35-2-0 (21 KOs)

7 **YORDENIS UGAS**
Cuba • 23-4-0 (11 KOs)

8 **JEFF HORN**
Australia • 19-1-1 (13 KOs)

9 **EGIDIJUS KAVALIAUSKAS**
Lithuania • 21-0-1 (17 KOs)

10 **SERGEY LIPINETS**
Russia • 15-1-0 (11 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **REGIS PROGRAIS**
U.S. • 24-0-0 (20 KOs)

2 **JOSH TAYLOR**
U.K. • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)

3 **JOSE RAMIREZ**
U.S. • 24-0-0 (16 KOs)

4 **MAURICE HOOKER**
U.S. • 26-0-3 (17 KOs)

5 **IVAN BARANCHYK**
Russia • 19-1-0 (12 KOs)

6 **VIKTOR POSTOL**
Ukraine • 31-2-0 (12 KOs)

7 **KIRYL RELIKH**
Belarus • 23-3-0 (19 KOs)

8 **YVES ULYSSE**
Canada • 18-1-0 (9 KOs)

9 **EDUARD TROYANOVSKY**
Russia • 27-2-0 (24 KOs)

10 **JOSE ZEPEDA**
U.S. • 30-2-0 (25 KOs)

Tyson Fury, The Ring's No. 1-rated heavyweight, made quick work of unrated Tom Schwarz in his Las Vegas debut.

No. 1-rated cruiserweight Mairis Briedis celebrates his controversial stoppage of Krzysztof Glowacki after three wild (and poorly officiated) rounds.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
Ukraine • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)

1 **RICHARD COMMEY**
Ghana • 28-2-0 (25 KOs)

2 **LUKE CAMPBELL**
U.K. • 20-2-0 (16 KOs)

3 **JOSE PEDRAZA**
P.R. • 26-2-0 (13 KOs)

4 **DEVIN HANEY**
U.S. • 22-0-0 (14 KOs)

5 **TEOFIMO LOPEZ**
U.S. • 13-0-0 (11 KOs)

6 **ROBERT EASTER**
U.S. • 21-1-1 (14 KOs)

7 **JAVIER FORTUNA**
Dom. Rep. • 34-2-1 (23 KOs)

8 **EMMANUEL TAGOE**
Ghana • 30-1-0 (14 KOs)

9 **ANTHONY CROLLA**
U.K. • 34-7-3 (13 KOs)

10 **RYAN GARCIA**
U.S. • 18-0-0 (15 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **MIGUEL BERCHELT**
Mexico • 36-1-0 (32 KOs)

2 **GERVONTA DAVIS**
U.S. • 21-0-0 (20 KOs)

3 **TEVIN FARMER**
U.S. • 29-4-1 (6 KOs)

4 **ANDREW CANCIO**
U.S. • 21-4-2 (16 KOs)

5 **JAMEL HERRING**
U.S. • 20-2-0 (10 KOs)

6 **JOSEPH DIAZ JR.**
U.S. • 29-1-0 (15 KOs)

7 **MASAYUKI ITO**
Japan • 25-2-1 (13 KOs)

8 **MIGUEL ROMAN**
Mexico • 61-13-0 (47 KOs)

9 **EDUARDO HERNANDEZ**
Mexico • 28-0-0 (25 KOs)

10 **FRANCISCO VARGAS**
Mexico • 25-2-2 (18 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **LEO SANTA CRUZ**
U.S. • 36-1-1 (19 KOs)

2 **JOSH WARRINGTON**
U.K. • 29-0-0 (6 KOs)

3 **GARY RUSSELL JR.**
U.S. • 30-1-0 (18 KOs)

4 **OSCAR VALDEZ**
Mexico • 26-0-0 (20 KOs)

5 **CARL FRAMPTON**
U.K. • 26-2-0 (15 KOs)

6 **XU CAN**
China • 17-2-0 (3 KOs)

7 **ABNER MARES**
Mexico • 31-3-1 (15 KOs)

8 **TUGSTSOGT NYAMBAYAR**
Mongolia • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)

9 **SHAKUR STEVENSON**
U.S. • 11-0-0 (6 KOs)

10 **KID GALAHAD**
U.K. • 26-1-0 (15 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **DANIEL ROMAN**
U.S. • 27-2-1 (10 KOs)

2 **REY VARGAS**
Mexico • 33-0-0 (22 KOs)

3 **EMANUEL NAVARRETE**
Mexico • 27-1-0 (23 KOs)

4 **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX**
Cuba • 18-1-0 (12 KOs)

5 **TJ DOHENY**
Australia • 21-1-0 (15 KOs)

6 **TOMOKI KAMEDA**
Japan • 36-2-0 (20 KOs)

7 **RYOSUKE IWASA**
Japan • 26-3-0 (16 KOs)

8 **BRANDON FIGUEROA**
U.S. • 19-0-0 (14 KOs)

9 **ISAAC DOGBOE**
Ghana • 20-2-0 (14 KOs)

10 **SHINGO WAKE**
Japan • 26-5-2 (18 KOs)

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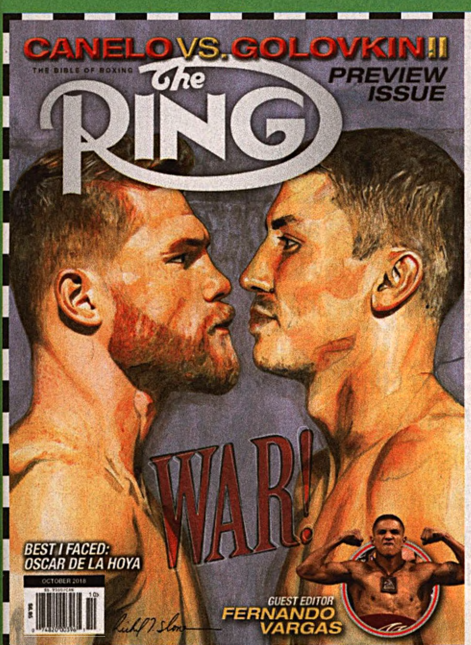

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RATINGS

Through fights of June 22, 2019

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

- **C NAOYA INOUE** Japan • 18-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **1 ZOLANI TETE** S. Africa • 28-3-0 (21 KOs)
- **2 LUIS NERY** Mexico • 29-0-0 (23 KOs)
- **3 NONITO DONAIRE** Phil. • 40-5-0 (26 KOs)
- **4 EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ** P.R. • 19-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **5 NORDINE OUBAALI** France • 15-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **6 JASON MOLONEY** Australia • 19-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **7 TAKUMA INOUE** Japan • 13-0-0 (3 KOs)
- **8 CARLOS CUADRAS** Mexico • 38-3-1 (27 KOs)
- **9 JOSHUA GREER** U.S. • 20-1-1 (12 KOs)
- **10 JOSHUA FRANCO** U.S. • 15-1-1 (7 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

- **C JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** Mexico • 39-3-0 (26 KOs)
- **1 SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI** Thailand • 47-5-1 (41 KOs)
- **2 DONNIE NIETES** Phil. • 42-1-5 (23 KOs)
- **3 KHALID YAFAI** U.K. • 25-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **4 KAZUTO IOKA** Japan • 24-2-0 (14 KOs)
- **5 JERWIN ANCAJAS** Phil. • 31-1-2 (21 KOs)
- **6 ROMAN GONZALEZ** Nicaragua • 47-2-0 (39 KOs)
- **7 ANDREW MOLONEY** Australia • 20-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **8 FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.** Mexico • 31-4-1 (22 KOs)
- **9 ALEJANDRO BARRIOS** Mexico • 19-2-5 (9 KOs)
- **10 ASTON PALICTE** Phil. • 25-3-1 (21 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 KOSEI TANAKA** Japan • 13-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **2 MORUTI MTHALANE** S. Africa • 38-2-0 (25 KOs)
- **3 ARTEM DALAKIAN** Ukraine • 19-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **4 JULIO CESAR MARTINEZ** Mexico • 14-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **5 CHARLIE EDWARDS** U.K. • 15-1-0 (6 KOs)
- **6 ANDREW SELBY** U.K. • 11-1-0 (6 KOs)
- **7 CRISTOFER ROSALES** Nicaragua • 28-4-0 (19 KOs)
- **8 MASAYUKI KURODA** Japan • 30-8-3 (16 KOs)
- **9 RYOICHI TAGUCHI** Japan • 27-4-2 (12 KOs)
- **10 JUNTO NAKATANI** Japan • 19-0-0 (14 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

- **C HIROTO KYOGUCHI** Japan • 13-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **1 KEN SHIRO** Japan • 15-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **2 HEKKIE BUDLER** S. Africa • 32-4-0 (10 KOs)
- **3 CARLOS CANIZALES** Venezuela • 22-0-1 (17 KOs)
- **4 FELIX ALVARADO** Nicaragua • 35-2-0 (30 KOs)
- **5 ELWIN SOTO** Mexico • 15-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **6 ANGEL ACOSTA** P.R. • 20-2-0 (20 KOs)
- **7 MILAN MELINDO** Phil. • 37-4-0 (13 KOs)
- **8 EDWARD HENO** Phil. • 14-0-5 (5 KOs)
- **9 TETSUYA HISADA** Japan • 34-9-2 (20 KOs)
- **10 SHO KIMURA** Japan • 18-3-2 (11 KOs)

Yunier Dorticos lived up to his "KO Doctor" moniker with a one-punch stoppage of Andrew Tabiti.

Elwin Soto (right) crashed the junior flyweight rankings with a controversial 12th-round stoppage of Angel Acosta.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART** Thailand • 19-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **2 WANHENG MENAYOTHIN** Thailand • 53-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **3 VIC SALUDAR** Phil. • 19-3-0 (10 KOs)
- **4 BYRON ROJAS** Nicaragua • 26-4-3 (11 KOs)
- **5 SIMPHIWE KHONCO** S. Africa • 19-5-0 (7 KOs)
- **6 DEEJAY KRIEL** S. Africa • 15-1-1 (7 KOs)
- **7 JOSE ARGUMEDO** Mexico • 23-4-1 (14 KOs)
- **8 TATSUYA FUKUHARA** Japan • 21-7-6 (7 KOs)
- **9 CARLOS LICONA** U.S. • 14-1-0 (2 KOs)
- **10 SAMUEL SALVA** Phil. • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

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CREATING A MONSTER

AS FIGHTERS ARE THE SUM OF THEIR PARTS, **NAOYA INOUE'S** BRILLIANCE COMES FROM MORE THAN JUST SCARY PUNCHING POWER

By **Tom Gray**

When bantamweights go to bed at night, they should be checking underneath it for Naoya Inoue.

No one is matching "The Monster" when it comes to wreaking havoc in the professional ranks. Vasiliy Lomachenko has the reputation for making top-level opponents quit in frustration. Terence Crawford dazzles fans with his improvised blend of skill, speed and spite. Boxing's biggest star, Canelo Alvarez, has been capturing the public's imagination with career-defining superfights.

All well and good – but nobody is doing it like Inoue.

"I've been saying for a while now that Naoya Inoue is the best pound-for-pound fighter in boxing," said trainer and cutman Rudy Hernandez. "I rank him above Lomachenko and Crawford because this guy has not only challenged the best, he's knocked them out and left no doubts about who he is.

"Every 10 years or so, we get a special fighter. Inoue does things with such ease, it reminds me of a Mike Tyson or Sugar Ray Leonard when they were in their prime. But because this kid is Japanese, he's not getting the attention he would be getting if he were an American. He's the guy in boxing right now that everyone should be looking out for. His timing, his punching power, his boxing IQ is superior to all."

Following crushing first-round victories over Jamie McDonnell and Juan Carlos Payano in 2018, Inoue was matched against unbeaten IBF titleholder Emmanuel Rodriguez in

Inoue sizes up Ricardo Rodriguez before blasting the Mexico City native in Round 3 of a 115-pound title defense in May 2017. It was the first and only time Rodriguez had been knocked out.

Emmanuel Rodriguez, expected to be competitive, lasted less than five minutes with Inoue.

the semifinals of the World Boxing Super Series. That bout took place at the SSE Hydro in Glasgow, Scotland, on May 18, and many expected the talented Puerto Rican to provide Inoue with a serious challenge.

He didn't have a prayer.

Rodriguez, never down in his professional career, was dropped three times and pulverized in two rounds. Roughly eight hours later – his mission complete – Inoue was on a flight back to Japan as The Ring Magazine's 118-pound champion. Meanwhile, the ratings panel was deliberating his inevitable move into the top five of the mythical pound-for-pound ratings.

For the third time running, Inoue had exceeded enormous expectations and the boxing world was speechless. Next up is Nonito Donaire, the reigning WBA bantamweight titleholder, and, as good as he is, "The Filipino Flash" will open as a huge betting underdog.

So, what makes Inoue so special? It's not just one thing, that's for sure.

The power is obvious, but the sum of his parts is more complex. In an effort to explore the fascination the boxing world has with this gifted three-weight world titleholder, The Ring reached out to an assortment of fighters, trainers and analysts and asked them to dissect one of the most formidable fighters in recent memory. We selected six categories: power, speed, fundamentals, economy, balance and body punching.

POWER

CARL FRAMPTON, former two-weight titleholder/TV analyst: Inoue's power is astonishing, but he's accurate and he punches correctly. He gets good length on the shots and turns his knuckles over. His biomechanics are perfect. I was sitting up-close near the ring apron (at the Rodriguez fight doing commentary), and there's apparently TV footage of me on social media just shaking my head in disbelief. His win over Rodriguez was one of the best live performances I've ever seen. That's a big statement, but he was brilliant.

STEPHEN "BREADMAN" EDWARDS, trainer: He's probably the hardest puncher pound-for-pound in boxing right now. The thing I like most about him is that he knocks people out with so many different shots: the right hand to the head, the left hook to the body, the left hook to the head – he's very even-handed. This guy is one of the biggest punchers from the lower weight divisions that I've seen in my life. You're talking guys like Manny Pacquiao, Alexis Arguello, Ruben Olivares – Inoue is one of the biggest punchers ever from 126 on down.

JOE GALLAGHER, trainer: You meet him face-to-face, then see him in the ring and it's like two totally different people. It's like he's walking around with bazookas in his gloves. That was a fantastic win last time out. I worked against Rodriguez with Paul Butler (Rodriguez won the vacant IBF title by unanimous decision in May 2018), and he's a solid operator. Against Inoue, Rodriguez probably won the first round, but once Inoue detonated that left hook it was game over. He just came in and absolutely crippled him with a body shot. To have Rodriguez turning to his corner and shaking his head – a fighter of that quality – speaks volumes about Inoue's power. He was hit and he stayed hit. It's unbelievable that Inoue has that much power for such a small man.

STEVE KIM, ESPN columnist: On a scale of 1 to 10, based on recent results, Inoue's power is a 10-plus. He's tearing through opposition that's known for being very durable at an unprecedented rate, and two of those

guys (McDonnell and Payano) didn't even see Round 2. It's impressive because the Payano knockout was a one-punch right-handed shotgun, but then he overwhelmed Rodriguez with combinations that were as fast as they were powerful. There's a versatility with the way he punches; it's not just about being strong, it's about executing and doing so at a world-class level. I don't think there's anyone else doing it the way he is right now.

SPEED

EDWARDS: His speed is the reason why he's such a great puncher. A lot of times, speed is power, because you don't get a chance to brace for the punches. If you see a punch coming, you can brace for impact, but with Inoue you can't brace for impact. He just hits you and – boom – it's almost like a sucker punch.

GALLAGHER: When you think of Sugar Ray Leonard, he had amazing speed mixed with some pop; just look at the knockouts of Dave "Boy" Green and Donny Lalonde. Inoue doesn't lose any power despite the great speed he carries in his fists. He's a one-punch solid hitter, but he puts his combinations together very well, and his shot selection during those combinations is very impressive.

KIM: A lot of guys are powerful, but they're not that fast. A lot of guys are fast, but they're not strong. Inoue seems to be a deadly combination of both. He doesn't just hit you hard, he hits you in such a blinding way. If his speed isn't a 10, it's probably a 9. If he didn't have the heavy-handedness and jolting power, I would argue that he could win a lot of these fights just by boxing.

FUNDAMENTALS

FRAMPTON: Inoue, like Canelo, has brilliant basics. The one thing we need to see from Inoue is how his movement is when he gets put under serious pressure. How does he slip shots and move under fire? We've seen that from Canelo, and he's brilliant at it. But from what we have seen so far, Inoue looks like almost the perfect fighter.

Inoue is a gifted athlete whose father, Shingo (background, glasses), has forged him into an elite boxer.

ZOLANI TETE, WBO bantamweight titleholder: He does everything perfectly, and as short as he is, he knows how to deal with a tall fighter. His technique and timing is perfect, and that's what makes him one of the best pound-for-pound. It'll be a good fight between us when it happens. It's brains against brains; Inoue is a very smart fighter and I'm a very smart fighter. It'll be all about chess, and whoever makes a mistake will pay for it.

BEN DAVISON, trainer: The likes of Crawford and Lomachenko are maybe a step ahead when it comes to skills and fundamentals, but Inoue has freakish power, and that's his advantage. As we've seen with (Deontay) Wilder, that type of power can make up for any small cracks in a fighter's game. I'm not saying Inoue makes a lot of mistakes, but if there are areas where he's not as developed, the power is making up for it. It'll take somebody with a very, very good skillset to exploit any deficiencies, but maybe Inoue has even more (skills/talent) than we know about and he's not been forced to show it yet.

EDWARDS: Inoue, as far as punch delivery and punch release, is a fighter you would want a young kid to watch. He doesn't load up or draw back or anything. The punches come straight from his shoulder, he pushes off his

feet and turns in with his hips. He has close to perfect punch technique. Joe Louis had that. Alexis Arguello, Ricardo Lopez and this kid right here, his punch technique and punch release is right up there with theirs.

and there's more natural power.

KIM: Inoue has a fundamentally classic style. Crawford is more like a jazz musician; he just kind of riffs, he naturally flows and adapts on the fly.

DOUG FISCHER, Ring Magazine editor-in-chief/TV analyst: Combined with his speed and power, the thing that makes Inoue such a dynamic puncher is his technique; he has the fundamentals. His feet are under him, and that's your boxing foundation. Inoue is brilliant at catching guys just as they're about to release their own power. That's down to his fundamentals, and in some ways – and I'm not a big fan of this guy – he reminds me of Andre Ward. Ward did a lot right, and his foot placement and balance were always there with any punch he delivered. The difference is that Inoue is a bit more dynamic; he's quick-twitch, his hands are quicker

Inoue's freakish speed and power is enhanced by excellent balance, textbook punching technique and sound fundamentals.

He's always riffing and doesn't play to a script. I've called Lomachenko the Baryshnikov of boxing; it's like ballet in there. But I'm not sure you could teach that style. Inoue's style is classic and it's textbook – the way he holds his elbows, the way he tucks his chin in a little bit. If you had a young kid coming into the gym for the first time and you asked yourself, 'Who can he be like,' while not at the same level, ideally it would be Inoue.

ECONOMY

TETE: As a fighter you must hit the target, not just throw for the sake of throwing. This is why you don't see me wasting punches. I check the target and I hit the target. If the target isn't there, then I pull my punches, because I don't want to get exhausted. Whatever I throw, I throw with mean intentions and I throw with power. Inoue does that too.

BILLY GRAHAM, trainer: He wants to knock you out. I like people who go for the knockout, but you can bet your life he won't go crazy looking for it. He's very economical; he sets things up, uses his feet, and fighters like that are always the best punchers. He's always on balance, he has great leverage and all that power is coming from the floor.

RUDY HERNANDEZ, trainer/cutman: Inoue doesn't waste punches. He picks up on the timing of an opponent, then he executes. He's so good at it – it's effortless. That's what makes him the best fighter in boxing. He's a technically fine-tuned machine. He may not look like much, he may not look dangerous, he's just very, very effective with everything he does.

BALANCE

DAVISON: One thing I've noticed is when someone's stood in front of him, he is very well-balanced, and that's when he gets the most leverage. Sometimes he overreaches when he has to come forward. When he has to step into his shots, he can get caught overreaching. But when someone's standing there mixing it with him, Inoue is very well-balanced. He's

MONSTER STATS

26
Years old

118
Pounds (fight weight)

81
Amateur fights (75-6, 48 KOs)

18
Professional fights (18-0, 16 KOs)

11
World title fights (11-0, 10 KOs)*

6
Fights to win his first title

8
Fights to win a title in a second division

18
Fights to win a title in a third division

7
Fights against former or current titleholders (7-0, 7 KOs)

*WBA "regular" title bouts not included

also very good at changing his head position, so he can vary up the shots he starts (his combinations) with. He has a very wide shot selection and does well adapting.

EDWARDS: His balance is everything. His balance is the reason he can punch in combination. If he didn't have such good balance, he would only carry his power for one or two shots. Deontay Wilder throws a big right hand and doesn't throw anything after that because he'd fall over. He puts everything into one shot. Inoue throws three or four deadly shots, so that's why I say he's the best puncher in boxing. Wilder might be the hardest puncher in boxing, but Inoue is the best puncher in boxing.

FISCHER: His balance is what makes him such an effective puncher and boxer. When Inoue goes in for the kill – and I've noted this – he can jump back out of range at any moment. If his opponent tries to nail him, he can step back, step in, jab, boom, boom and hit the opponent with combinations. He's very adept at that, and that's down to his balance, athleticism, reflexes and hand-eye coordination.

BODY ATTACK

TETE: He is a very good body-puncher, and his intention is to knock the guy out when he throws there. We saw that in his last fight (with Rodriguez); once Inoue lands to the body, the opponent doesn't want to fight anymore. That's because of the pain. Body punching like that is a killer in the sport of boxing. If you want to knock a guy out, go from body to head. Killing the body is the best thing.

GRAHAM: His body attack is brilliant. People often make a mistake and think boxing skill is just someone who's tall and throws long, correct punches. When you're a shorter man and you've got to get inside and work the body, you've got to be technically excellent. You get big punchers who swing and take you out, but a precision puncher has to be so technical. The best body-punchers are people who can put singles to vital areas at the right time. That's what Inoue does; he's a perfect precision puncher.

HERNANDEZ: Inoue is a well-educated fighter. He understands that if you hit the chin, the guard goes up and the body is open. He combines head-body and body-head. He won't just attack one or the other. If you pay attention to the way he threw the left hook (that floored Rodriguez for the second knockdown), the way it was delivered was awesome. It's little things that the great fighters do that make such a big difference when they land their punches. It was a very short left hook, but the manner of how it was thrown, the angle of delivery made it so much more effective. He knows where that liver is at – you can't beat that.

FISCHER: I wrote about the body attack in my fight report from the first Superfly card (when Inoue faced Antonio Nieves). Inoue didn't blow our socks off that night because he was very patient in stopping Nieves. He just broke him down gradually, systematically, with the body attack, and I liked his commitment to the body. What really impresses me is that Inoue can be in there with someone with a negative style, a mobile style, and he can still get to their body and get to it quickly. Rodriguez can move well, Jamie McDonnell can move well and (Omar) Narvaez made a career out of fighting in that style. I said in my fight report for the Nieves fight, "(Inoue) is an excellent body-puncher, definitely one of the best in boxing." Since then, I think he's become arguably the best body-puncher in boxing – definitely top three.

Tom Gray is Associate Editor for Ring Magazine. Follow him on Twitter: @Tom_Gray_Boxing.

More than 20,000 fans inside Madison Square Garden stand in shock and awe as Anthony Joshua receives a count for one of the four knockdowns he suffered against Andy Ruiz Jr. on June 1.

AFTER THE FALL

The shock waves were seismic. It had all gone so well for Anthony Joshua: super heavyweight Olympic gold medalist of the 2012 Games in London, 22 fights unbeaten with three of the four major heavyweight belts in his grasp. Huge commercial deals, beloved by the mainstream, developing fight by fight.

Just the one belt, the WBC strap, was needed to make him the undisputed king of the glamour division. Latecomer to the party Andy Ruiz Jr., though, had other ideas as "AJ" – set up to conquer America under the banner of Eddie Hearn's Matchroom Sport and digital sports streaming service DAZN – suffered the first dramatic defeat of his career, stopped in the seventh round at Madison Square Garden.

EVERYBODY HAS AN OPINION ON WHAT **ANTHONY JOSHUA** SHOULD DO IN THE WAKE OF HIS MONUMENTAL UPSET LOSS TO **ANDY RUIZ JR.**, BUT THE FORMER UNIFIED TITLEHOLDER APPEARS HEADED FOR AN IMMEDIATE REMATCH

By **Gareth A Davies**

AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

AFTER THE FALL

Truly humbled and humiliated by a 20-to-1 outsider.

All week the huge neon advertising billboards outside Penn Station showed Joshua clothed in Hugo Boss. Smiling, handsome, the world at his feet. As stunned fans streamed out of the grand arena late into the night, the marquee had been kidnapped by hubris with Ruiz playing his role as Nemesis.

On such hallowed boxing turf, the reactions were always going to be profound. The facts: Joshua was dropped four times by the Mexican-American, who claimed the British boxer's three world title belts in one of the biggest upsets in heavyweight history. It will be forever compared to the night in 1990 when the unfavored Buster Douglas knocked out then-undefeated Mike Tyson at the Tokyo Dome.

Tyson recovered from it. Now the 29-year-old Briton must haul his broken spirit and body up from the canvas and do the same.

Boxing is an unforgiving sport at the best of times. Now we will really find out where the championship material exists inside the body and soul of the champion they said could become "the undisputed one."

It was going to plan into the third round, when Joshua floored Ruiz for the first time in his career. But as he looked for the finish, he was knocked down himself by a counter and, in truth, never really recovered his legs or his vigor in the contest. After Joshua suffered a second knockdown, the two fighters pawed at each other for the next three rounds, Ruiz stalking and waiting patiently for the much bigger man to open up again. It came in the seventh round as Joshua, once again successful with his hook, was then countered by Ruiz, who went into attacking mode, throwing fast combinations from the inside to drop Joshua twice more.

After the final knockdown, Joshua's arms hanging on the ropes in his own corner, referee Mike Griffin made the decision that the Briton was in no position to continue. Joshua was outfought and outthought by Ruiz, who took the fight on 5½ weeks notice after the original opponent, Jarrell Miller, was removed for testing positive for three separate banned substances.

Ruiz had showed his fighting IQ and counterattacking skills. Joshua's weaknesses have emerged intermittently in past fights, but Ruiz brutally exposed them here. The former titleholder looked robotic in attack and lacked guile when hurt. He also failed to stick to Rob McCracken's game plan when the trainer urged his man to use his jab to open up an opportunity, only for Joshua to engage his opponent with attempted heavy punches instead. By the end of the sixth, with his nose bloodied, Joshua was heard asking his team: "Why am I feeling like this?"

In the next round, Ruiz sent him down twice more, leaving the Briton looking exhausted, dazed and confused. Ruiz was a very worthy winner and the first heavyweight of Mexican descent to hold a championship belt.

Since the loss, the inquest has been long, loud and hard on Joshua. The bones have been picked out of the ruins of the fight. How good is he really, they are asking – "they" being the critics of his heavily hyped fast track to the top. But what really went wrong on the night, and indeed in the buildup? And how wise is it for Joshua – and promoter Hearn, alongside pressure from DAZN – to stake a claim to an immediate rematch? How wise would it be to return to The Garden, moreover, where the pressure would pile high on Joshua late in the year?

We know what conventional wisdom tells us about this. Do it. Go for it, if it is clear that strategic and technical adjustments can be hatched and implemented to reverse the first fight.

Everyone had an opinion in the aftermath. Perhaps it really wasn't one of the biggest shocks. Ruiz was a decent boxer, took his moment with aplomb and made history himself. The buildup was certainly unusual, Joshua handing over his belts to Ruiz for a photo op after the final press conference and really not looking himself in the ring during the fight. Even trainer McCracken was subdued in the corner between rounds.

The rivals lined up to flog Joshua – and Hearn, for that matter. Promoter Bob Arum called it "insane, silly, the dumbest thing" for the dethroned heavyweight king to rematch Ruiz with alacrity. "Maybe he didn't train hard enough. Maybe he suffered an injury. When something like this happens, there may never be that Joshua again."

Arum, who is promoting into his sixth decade, has seen this before. And it can go one of many ways, he believes.

Had Joshua (here chatting it up with Prince Harry) become more celebrity than fighter prior to his loss?

Forget the straight rematch, says Arum. "It's the dumbest thing from the standpoint of a young fighter, which Joshua is, who you want to bring back and recover. The idea you'd put him back in with Ruiz is insane. Give him some fights. Forget about the titles. The titles will always be there. Joshua is a great personality. He shouldn't go back with Andy Ruiz. Any real boxing guy would tell you that. Unfortunately, his promoter is not a boxing guy."

But could Joshua rebuild and be the same force? "No, he'll never be the same," Arum said. "He could beat Ruiz, but he'll never be the same. So much of boxing is mental. Opponents will never give him the respect he would have got before.

"Nobody could beat Mike Tyson until Buster Douglas. Then guys like Evander Holyfield realized that they would have a good chance with Mike, because they weren't intimidated. When Tyson became a professional, I booked Tyson every other week – and they were all one-round knockouts – because I'd look across the ring at the opponent and the guy's legs would be shaking. Tyson had built up that reputation. Once he's beaten, that reputation is diminished and the fighters have a lot more confidence."

Two days after the fight, I caught up with the great George Foreman. His overriding feeling was that Joshua should be rebuilt carefully. "There is a process of grieving after a loss like this. When you are the heavyweight champion of the world, it is not like you have lost a fight; you have actually lost a part of yourself. You have got to find it again. A lot of times the hardest part is you did not just get beat, you fell for the hype. People say you are so good, and you think you have let them down.

"I have been in that position,

being on the floor when I fought Muhammad Ali in Zaire, in the Rumble in the Jungle. The greatest thing is the embarrassment. If he can overcome that, he will be a better fighter and an even better champion."

Foreman recalled: "You find yourself on the heavy punching bags; you are angry. I would not be anxious for a quick rematch with Ruiz at all. I do not believe he should go into the rematch later this year or next. He does not need Ruiz; Ruiz needs him. In six months, all those belts will be split again. In six months, they will be out there again and Joshua can get one of them back and then eventually two of them. Go back and start all over. You cannot be in a rush. If I can be heavyweight champ 20 years after I lost it, certainly this young man can be. In two years, he will have all those belts again. He is a great fighter and the future belongs to him."

Technique was something Big George wanted to touch on. "(Joshua) wasn't prepared for this guy. He did not know how to use his height. I wish I could spend a few weeks with him to help him get himself back together. To let him know how to be tall. I am out here if Anthony wants to reach out. If he wants to come and see me or talk to me, I am always there for him. After I saw him lose and how he reacted, I am a bigger fan than I ever was before."

Eddie Hearn, indeed, did confirm – as Foreman knew having been in the same position – that Joshua felt anger at himself already and was insistent on righting the wrongs of the defeat. To Madison Square Garden they may march again late in the year. "I just have to turn it around a few notches and bring it back my way," Joshua said. "I don't want people to drown in their sorrows. One hundred percent I want the rematch. This will show I have the power and the strength."

That might be true, but Joshua needs to show the technique to defeat the smaller heavyweight. That will be key in the second encounter, which does look genuinely risky.

Other matters came to the fore. In the chaos that ensued after the fight, Joshua's father, Robert, rushed into the ring and appeared to seek out promoter Hearn. "No, it's me, I'm the one fighting," Joshua was seen saying to his father, who was pointing in the promoter's direction. Later, Joshua said: "My dad's upset, which is a natural reaction."

Hearn said Joshua "was in total control of the fight, but he got sloppy and never recovered.

"AJ will come back 100 percent. AJ will be devastated when it sinks in. But it makes the autumn rematch a 'must win.'"

Other prominent figures had views on the disastrous U.S. debut for Joshua. Former undisputed heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis and promoter Frank Warren were among those suggesting that the fighter should part ways with coach McCracken. "I say you can't go to university with your third-grade teacher," said Lewis, calling into question the advice Joshua was being given between rounds by his trainer. "They won't have the answers you need at that level. You need a professor by then."

Warren, promoter of rival Tyson Fury, who entertained two weeks later in Las Vegas against hapless Tom Schwarz, told me two days after Joshua's defeat that "somebody's got to be accountable for this."

NICK POTTS

Will the rematch be any different? Joshua's doubters don't believe he can reverse the outcome.

Warren added: "I say what I see. What I've seen all the way through it is an outstanding young prospect not improved – not improved at all. The world heavyweight championship was given to him on a plate by the worst heavyweight champion ever in Charles Martin. He then fought Wladimir Klitschko, who had been taken to school 18 months earlier by Tyson Fury. Klitschko has always been safety-first. He had Joshua on his backside, and if he had anything like Ruiz did, Klitschko would have stopped Joshua."

"At the end of the day, it's about boxing. Joshua has done really well with the endorsements. But the world will now change for Joshua, big time. It's all very well having a deal with DAZN in the USA, but everything levels out in the end. It's down to one thing: what people know about boxing. The whole way this has been done, they've had the luckiest ride of any heavyweight ever in the division. Charles Martin – he was garbage. They got the title because Tyson Fury vacated the titles. One man's bad luck is another man's good luck. And that's what he got."

On a rematch with Ruiz, Warren added: "What else is Joshua going to do? Where's he going to go? He's got to rematch him. And let me tell you, it'll be the same next time. This fella took the fight at five weeks' notice. He'll get a full camp this time. It's not about being carved out of marble; it's about boxing ability and desire. I'm not saying that Joshua doesn't want it, but he didn't look like he wanted to be in there after two rounds. The referee did him great favors with the count, too. He gave him a lot of time to recover."

But answers were needed for Joshua's listlessness in the fight. Hearn played down other rumors that Joshua had suffered a panic attack prior to the fight. He was also forced to deny claims that the British heavyweight was hurt in sparring during his camp in Miami. There were whispers in some quarters that Joshua had been knocked to the canvas by Joey Dawejko, a 28-year-old heavyweight nicknamed "Tank" and not dissimilar in build to Ruiz. Dawejko is understood to have been signed by Matchroom USA.

The fighter himself dismissed suggestions that he had suffered an injury after he was seen with a large bruise below his left eye and a cut on his face in fight week. The fighter said it had come from "physio stuff."

"Absolutely there is no truth that he was badly hurt in sparring. There were no health concerns going into the fight," Hearn told me. "The biggest concern was a stye on his eye. He's putting on a brave face after the defeat, but he is already starting to think about getting revenge. He was caught by a big shot but was in control up to that point. The rematch is a huge fight, and there's a lot of pressure on AJ to win it."

Regardless of the events leading up to the contest and whether they were true or not, it looks as if Ruiz was underestimated by Joshua. It was certainly a wake-up call of major proportions. When they meet again, Joshua will be the challenger, and the quest for redemption will be his gamble. The stakes could not be higher the second time around.

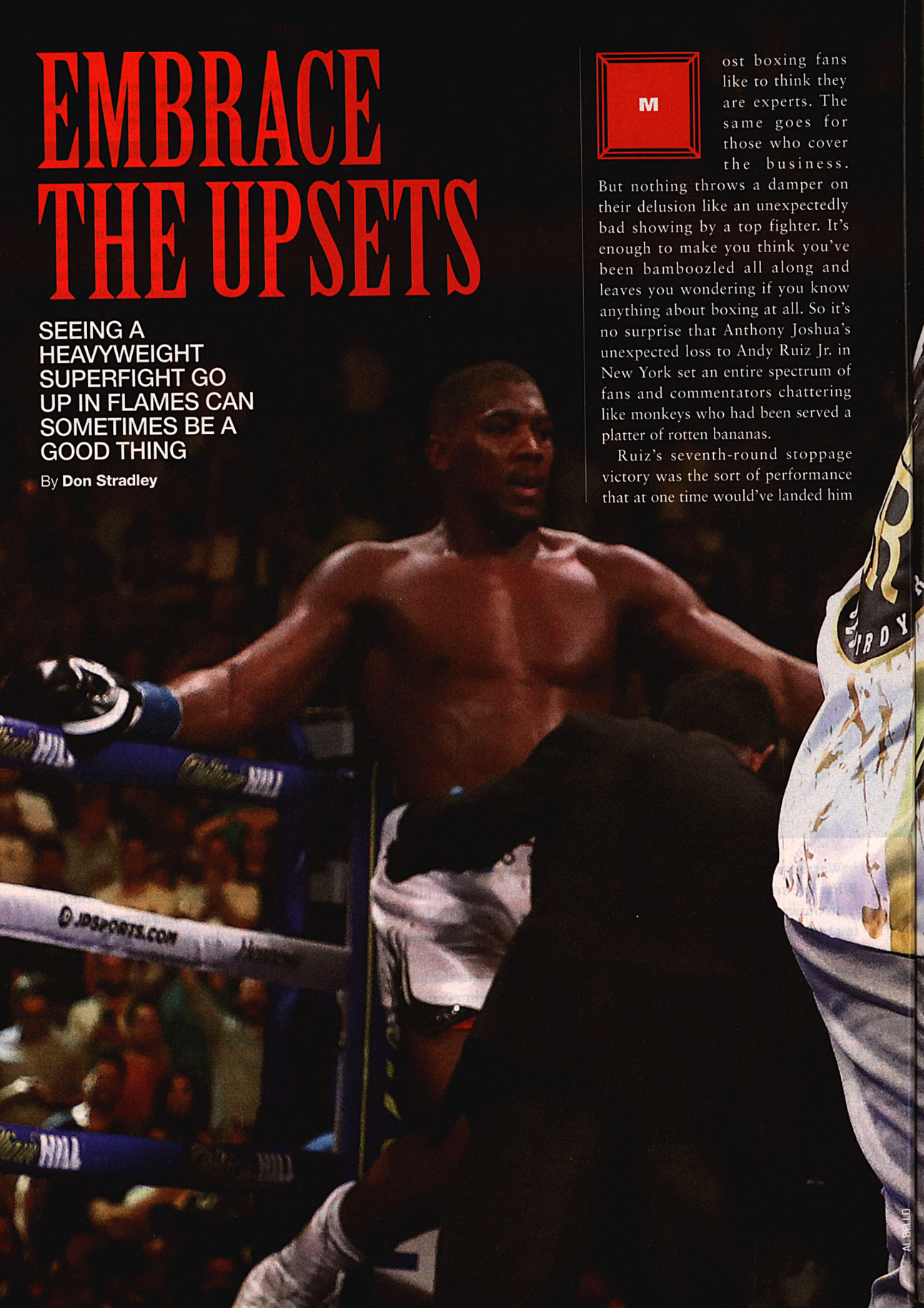
EMBRACE THE UPSETS

SEEING A HEAVYWEIGHT SUPERFIGHT GO UP IN FLAMES CAN SOMETIMES BE A GOOD THING

By **Don Stradley**

Most boxing fans like to think they are experts. The same goes for those who cover the business. But nothing throws a damper on their delusion like an unexpectedly bad showing by a top fighter. It's enough to make you think you've been bamboozled all along and leaves you wondering if you know anything about boxing at all. So it's no surprise that Anthony Joshua's unexpected loss to Andy Ruiz Jr. in New York set an entire spectrum of fans and commentators chattering like monkeys who had been served a platter of rotten bananas.

Ruiz's seventh-round stoppage victory was the sort of performance that at one time would've landed him



a movie deal, a phone call from the president and his picture on a box of Wheaties. These days, he gets an appearance on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, a nice parade in his hometown of Imperial, California, some YouTube clips and a chance to fight Joshua again, hopefully for some big bucks. Most of the post-fight talk revolved around Ruiz's plump physique and where his upset win ranked in boxing history. Gradually it was determined that Ruiz, a fine fighter with quick hands, wasn't exactly a chump, and the oddsmakers who'd made him such a prohibitive underdog were off base.

Yet a hint of anger seemed to intrude on what should've been an unbridled feel-good story. If we're to believe a certain faction in the boxing world, Ruiz's victory "robbed" the boxing public of the fight we really wanted to see, which would've pitted Joshua against the big American banger, Deontay Wilder. Of course, that's nonsense. True, some of the sparkle may be gone, but chances are we'll still get Wilder-Joshua. It will still be a massive event. It will still make money.

What Ruiz did by flogging Joshua and taking his title belts was break the division open. While the heavyweight class seemed dominated by the formidable trio of Wilder, Joshua, and Tyson Fury, now there's a sense that the class is like the Wild West, with a dangerous man in every saloon. Unfortunately, the U.K.'s "AJ" seems much less dangerous than he once did. He'll have a job on his hands to undo his new image as a chinny, overrated weakling who, after getting tagged once in Madison Square Garden, seemed to forget how to box. But Ruiz didn't rob us of anything, and we should only see the positives of his unexpected win. If anything, he ensured a shuffling of the deck. Heavyweight boxing undergoes this tectonic shift every now and then, and we should be glad of it.

Muhammad Ali was probably unconcerned when his nemesis, Joe Frazier, entered the ring as a 3½-to-1 favorite to face an untested and awkward challenger named George Foreman. The world, of course, was waiting for a rematch of Ali-Frazier, an epic tussle won by Frazier by 15-round decision. All Frazier had to do was steamroll Foreman, as many thought he would do. Foreman, after all, had never fought anyone of Frazier's caliber. Ali assumed that he was only a few months away from another money bout with the only man who had beaten him to that time. But in January of 1973, as Frazier hit sunny Jamaica to defend the heavyweight title, an entire generation of boxing fans learned to expect the wildly unexpected.

And it took only a few minutes.

As Foreman scored a stoppage midway through the second round, dreams of Ali-Frazier II went up not in smoke, but in absolute flames. Six times Frazier went down, clubbed to the canvas by Foreman's heavy punches. Though Foreman's destructive power is now well-known, at the time his dominance of Frazier was a shock to the senses. The New York Daily News claimed Foreman's victory belonged "with the most stunning upsets in boxing annals."

Ali played it cool, claiming he'd not bothered to watch the bout and that Frazier had never really recovered from their grueling contest two years earlier. "I'll be here when they're both gone," Ali told the press. Ali joked that he'd lost out on millions now that Frazier had been dethroned, but he knew money could be made if he fought Foreman. He wanted a few tune-ups, however, and one of the names on his list was a Marine named Ken Norton.

Frazier-Foreman set the stage for epic heavyweight encounters.

Norton faced Ali in San Diego as a 5-to-1 underdog. Undaunted by Ali's aura, he scored a split decision over "the Greatest," sent him home with a broken jaw and became an instant star. Meanwhile, Ali rose from the ashes to beat Norton in a rematch, he got his second bout with Frazier and, though the luster had worn off, won that one, too. Then he was off to Africa in 1974 to defeat Foreman in one of the most dramatic title changes in history. After that came Ali's rubber match with Frazier, the now nearly mythical "Thrilla in Manila." Ali took that one on a 14th-round TKO, establishing himself once and for all as an all-time great. Leave it to Ali to show us how to return from an upset loss.

Did the upsets scored by Foreman and Norton throw wrenches into people's plans? Yes. But they also helped generate another four years or so of memorable heavyweight bouts. Granted, this doesn't always happen. In 1993, Ray Mercer was on the fast track to face heavyweight champ Riddick Bowe, only to blow the opportunity when he lost a decision to Jesse Ferguson in New York. Mercer's poor performance was followed by an investigation into rumors that he'd offered Ferguson a bribe to let him win. Ferguson went on to face Bowe and was knocked out in the second round. Mercer, trying to regroup after the upset and bribery scandal, defeated Ferguson by split decision in a rematch. For Mercer, though, there was no majestic return to glory, only a mixture of ups and downs. A decade later, he was serving as an opponent for Wladimir Klitschko and Shannon Briggs and beating up on unknowns in Coconut Creek, Florida.

The same year of Mercer's upset loss, highly touted Tommy Morrison had his own career hijacked by an

upset. Morrison had recently defeated Foreman for the vacant and relatively new WBO title belt. With only one loss on his record – coincidentally, it was a knockout loss to Mercer – Morrison was two months away from fighting WBC titleholder Lennox Lewis. A stop in Tulsa, Oklahoma, to tune up on Michael Bentt changed everything. Bentt, in only his 12th pro bout, stopped Morrison in the first round. Sadly for Bentt, he couldn't capitalize on his win; he retired after suffering injuries in his next bout. Morrison met Lewis nearly two years after their initial meeting had been scotched. Lewis knocked him out, laying to rest whatever remained of Morrison's star power.

Lewis, too, dealt with upsets on his way to bigger bouts. In 1994, there was much speculation that Lewis would defend his title against Bowe in what would've been a lucrative return bout of two Olympic rivals. In September, the gods of the upset hovered over Wembley Arena in London as Lewis, a 5-to-1 favorite, was knocked out by Oliver McCall at 0:30 of Round 2. Lewis won the rematch in 1997, a bizarre bout where McCall appeared to have an emotional breakdown, but by then Bowe was out of boxing and Lewis was out of luck.

Lewis never got his bout with "Big Daddy," but as the years rolled on, a matchup with Mike Tyson looked to be a financial no-brainer. All that delayed it was Tyson and Lewis being tied to different networks. Before those details could be ironed out, however, Lewis was knocked out in South Africa by the unheralded Hasim Rahman in The Ring's Upset of the Year. Exemplifying the expression "overnight sensation," Rahman was suddenly the hottest property in the business. It looked like he, and not Lewis, would fight Tyson. Instead, Rahman fought Lewis again and lost by brutal knockout in the fourth. Lewis went on to face Tyson as planned, stopping him in the eighth. The two were past their primes, but their 2002 face-off in Memphis still drew viewers and was, for a few rounds at least, as dramatic as anyone could've expected.

Whatever interest people had in a Joshua-Wilder bout was nothing near the anticipation of a showdown between Tyson and Evander Holyfield back in 1990. The bout was already made for Atlantic City with Tyson guaranteed $22 million and Holyfield $11 million, Tyson's being the largest guaranteed payday in the sport's history to that date. Enter James "Buster" Douglas, a fringe contender being sacrificed to Tyson for the amusement of Tokyo businessmen. With Holyfield scowling at ringside, Douglas pulled off the upset of the ages, ignoring the 42-to-1 odds against him and stopping Tyson in the 10th round. A Tyson-Holyfield fight was still in the works when Tyson was sent to prison for rape in 1992. It wasn't until 1996 that we got Tyson-Holyfield, a full six years since it was originally pitched. Though both fighters seemed shopworn, it was still a marketable bout, and Holyfield's surprising victory set up the highly lucrative and widely viewed rematch, a pop culture event marred by Tyson's disqualification for biting Holyfield's ears. Would Tyson-Holyfield have been a bigger deal in 1990 when both were undefeated? Sure. But it still turned out to be a classic. And it's doubtful that Tyson and Holyfield in 1990 would've created the whopping numbers of the 1997 rematch, which clocked in with nearly two million domestic pay-per-view buys.

When discussing heavyweight upsets that rocked the proverbial apple cart, we have to mention that earth-shaking moment in 1936 when 10-to-1 underdog Max Schmeling scored a 12th-round knockout of Joe Louis at Yankee Stadium. At the time, Louis was already considered the unrivaled savior of fistiana, a young dynamo certain to unseat reigning champion Jim Braddock, who had won the title a year before with his own upset over Max Baer. Schmeling jarred Louis repeatedly with right hands until the 22-year-old Detroiter fell for a 10 count, his face as swollen as a Halloween pumpkin. The next year or so was a blur of political intrigue and boxing blarney as promoter Mike Jacobs quickly rebuilt Louis by matching him with the likes of Jack Sharkey and Bob Pastor – easy pickings for Louis – while Schmeling was politely stonewalled in his efforts to challenge Braddock. Jacobs played on the social fears of the day, concerned that Schmeling might beat Braddock and take the championship to Nazi Germany. In June 1937, Louis fought Braddock for the title at roughly the same time he would have if he'd beaten Schmeling in '36. Louis stopped Braddock in the eighth, leaving "The Cinderella Man" in a pool of his own blood and taking the championship as everyone knew he would. Right on schedule.

The upset loss to Schmeling hadn't changed Louis' career path much at all. Naturally, he heard his share of criticism in the next few months, and it was every bit as bad as what Joshua has been hearing. Probably worse. Louis endured, beating Schmeling in a rematch and in the process becoming a national hero. Perhaps Joshua will take a page from Louis' playbook and reestablish himself by beating Ruiz in a rematch. He could show us, once again, that upsets aren't the end of things. They're usually just a bump in the road, and the road doesn't always lead to Coconut Creek.

Mike Tyson's upset loss to Buster Douglas killed his aura of invincibility, but he remained a PPV attraction.

MICHAEL BRENNAN

BATTLE PLAN: JOSHUA'S REVENGE

THREE NOTED TRAINERS OFFER THEIR WISDOM ON WHAT **ANTHONY JOSHUA** MUST TO DO REGAIN HIS TITLES FROM **ANDY RUIZ JR.**

By **Ryan Songalia**

It was the sort of turn of events that Hollywood scripts are made of. Some movie executives would have tossed it in the trash because of how unbelievable it would appear to casual observers that the Adonis-like Anthony Joshua could be felled by someone who looked like Andy Ruiz. Joshua, the unbeaten British guest at Madison Square Garden, was chiseled at 6-foot-6 and 247 pounds; Ruiz, barely standing 6-foot-2, weighed in at 268 flabby-looking pounds.

However, boxing isn't a bodybuilding competition, and even

NICK POTTS

Anthony Joshua, usually a confident ring general, had no answers for Andy Ruiz Jr. Can the British star regroup and win the rematch?

BATTLE PLAN: JOSHUA'S REVENGE

the most treasured of Picasso's paintings can be devalued by putting a fist through the frame. When the fight was stopped in Round 7 after Joshua had been dropped a fourth time, it appeared he'd been broken mentally as much as physically.

A rematch clause was included in the contract, and there had been debate over whether Joshua should exercise it, but it took less than a week for the British star to pull that lever. By all appearances, Joshua will be retaining the services of head trainer Robert McCracken for a date in November or December at a location still to be announced.

To examine the prospects of Joshua turning the tables in the rematch, The Ring reached out to three noted trainers – **Ronnie Shields**, **Clarence "Bones" Adams** and **James "Buddy" McGirt** – to lend their insight. Both Shields and McGirt have trained numerous world champions after their own fighting careers came to an end, while Adams, a former 122-pound titleholder who now owns his own Las Vegas gym, can boast of being "unbeaten" since becoming a trainer three years ago.

Adams and Shields emphasized the need for Joshua to use his height to keep the shorter man away, even if it meant winning a less entertaining decision. McGirt, a 2019 International Boxing Hall of Fame inductee now based in Southern California, didn't want to give too much away, but says Joshua will have to make Ruiz uncomfortable to have a shot at raising his three belts.

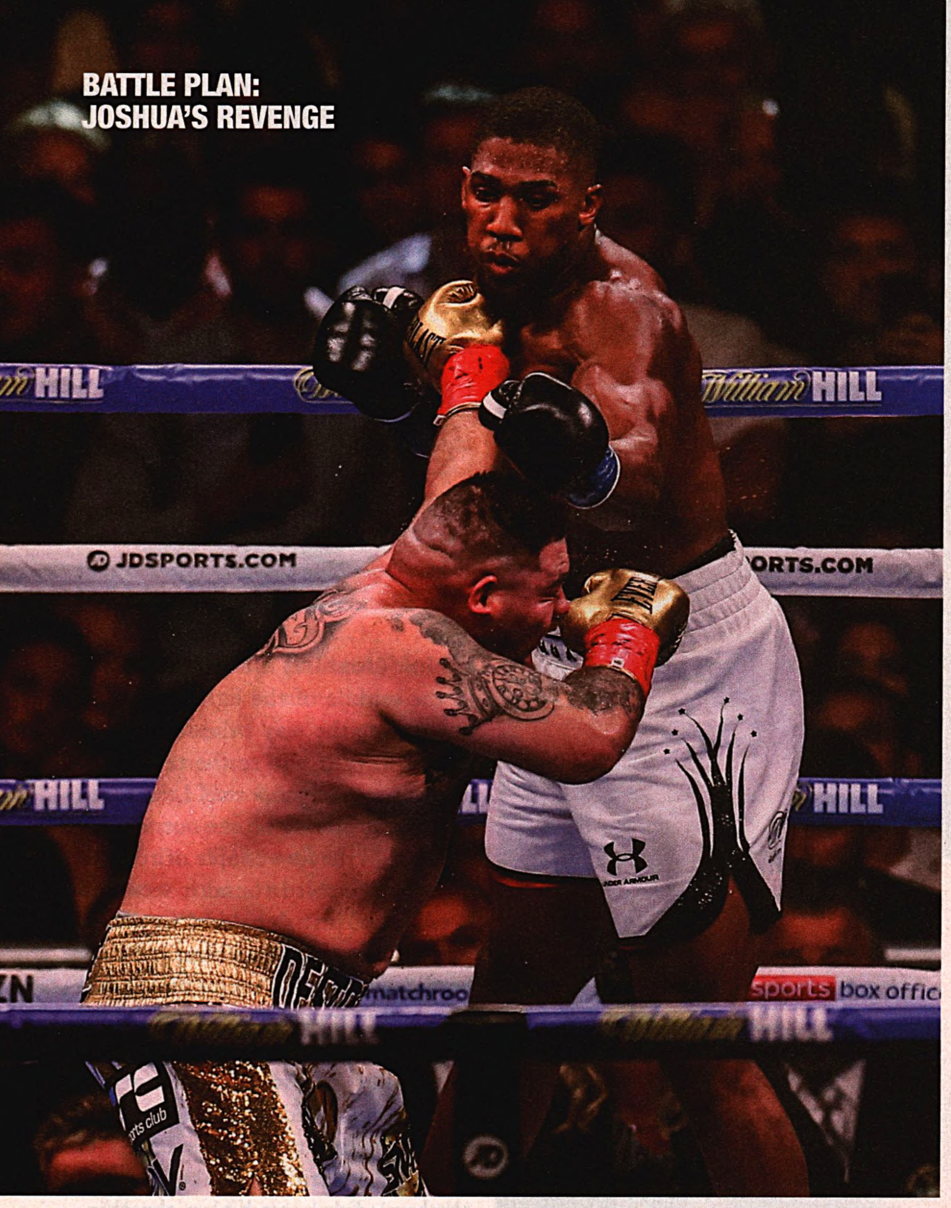
The trainers discussed what went wrong in the first fight, Joshua's keys to victory in a rematch, the wisdom of going directly to a rematch after a knockout and their gut feelings for what happens when the two meet again.

Joshua scored with his left hook, but it put him in range for Ruiz's counters.

RONNIE SHIELDS

I think (Joshua) made a mistake in the middle of the fight. He came out boxing the way I think anybody would have if you're the taller guy and you've got the frame. I think the key to it is boxing on the outside. He did that in the first couple of rounds. Then in the third round it seems to me like he just decided I'm gonna put a little pressure on him, and then he did, and he hit him with a good shot and dropped him. He didn't hurt him, and that was the key. Ruiz went down, but Ruiz wasn't hurt at all. Then Joshua tried to put the pressure on him again and go after him, and that was a terrible mistake. Because (Joshua) didn't get hit on the chin; he got hit on the temple. People said Joshua had a suspect chin, but that wasn't on the chin. And he never recovered from that.

It's dangerous (going straight to the rematch), but at the same time it can be dangerous if you accept a lesser opponent and the same thing happens to you. For me, I think because he had the ability to stay on the outside and box, I think it's feasible for him to say, 'You know what? I know what I did wrong, and I'm gonna go in the gym and correct that and know that I just can't stand and go toe-to-toe with this short guy. I have to keep him on the outside at the end of my jab and box him.' (If he doesn't realize this), the same thing can happen to him against somebody else. Also, when he got dropped in the third round, he looked like he was a goner. He was tired; he didn't look like he was in shape at all.



I think there's more to it that he can do, so I'll say yes, you go straight to the rematch.

(Joshua) looks the part, but still we will never know how good a shape he was actually in. He should've been in enough shape to go 12 rounds. He had enough time to train for this guy; he was already training for (Jarrell) Miller, and then all of a sudden that didn't happen. Heavyweights are heavyweights – every one of them is different. The third round, when he hit Ruiz and tried to finish him, then he got hurt and when he got dropped twice … when he came up in the fourth round, he looked like he was OK. He boxed him. And actually I gave him the fourth round. Ruiz fought a very smart fight – he didn't come out and jump on top of him. He tried to save his stamina, too, because he threw a lot of punches in the third round himself. He lost the fourth round, lost the fifth round, but then he started to pick it up in the sixth round. And then, of course, the seventh round he really picked it up. Joshua, he just looked like he never recovered from the knockdowns in the third round.

All three trainers believe Joshua's jab is one of his main keys to success in the rematch.

What (Joshua) has to do is not try to knock this guy out. I think that's the biggest mistake that he did. He wanted to go for the knockout. I think he felt in his heart that he had to knock Ruiz out, but obviously they didn't do their homework on Andy Ruiz. Because if you did your homework on Andy Ruiz, you know he may not look the part but he is the part, and the guy can really fight. I think that was a bad mistake on their part. Ruiz proved all the skeptics wrong. Going into the rematch, Joshua has to realize that sometimes you have to use all of your God-given ability, stay on the outside, box him and go ahead and win a lackluster decision and move on to the next one. An ugly win is so much better than a pretty loss.

I think Joshua, right now, he really screwed himself up, because he woke up the sleeping giant. I think Ruiz has gotta get himself in better condition, because he can't take off a couple of rounds like he did in the fourth and fifth rounds. He's gotta realize that for his stature, he's gotta continue to put the pressure on Joshua. So I think it'll be a tough night for both guys, but at the same time Joshua may be a little gun-shy. I think if Ruiz can continue to put punches together, I think Ruiz can stop him again.

CLARENCE "BONES" ADAMS

Where (Joshua) made a mistake was that he wasn't prepared for Andy Ruiz and the closing (foot) speed that (Ruiz) has, and he put himself in Andy's range when he shouldn't have. He should have kept his distance, but he didn't do that. How he got his first knockdown, he was at his distance. Then he came into Andy's distance and got cracked. Andy can punch, and he's very heavy-handed.

Is an immediate rematch a good idea? Lennox Lewis did it and came

ANTHONY GEATHERS

back tremendously. I guess it just depends on the person. He may have lost (against Hasim Rahman), but he came back with a vengeance; in the very next fight, he tore them up. It just depends on Joshua.

Just keep his distance and box smart, that's all (Joshua) needs to do. Ruiz may look like a jellybean, but he fights like a tiger. Andy has very good closing speed, so Anthony needs to keep his feet moving as well, know his distance and range and work with that. Andy has very good closing speed if you allow it, and Anthony allowed it by trying to knock him out. I don't know if it's conditioning, either, but he never recovered from that shot. If you watch that tape, that happened in the third round. They finish the round, the fourth round goes by, then in the corner Anthony's asking, 'I got knocked down? What'd I get hit with?' He didn't even know. That tells you he never recovered. So that could have been his conditioning side or whatever.

Joshua can win the fight – I wouldn't say easily – if he's prepared properly and it's explained to him how to box for a guy his size. But if nothing changes, Andy Ruiz is gonna knock him out again. It just may take a little bit longer, but he'll do it.

Joshua has an astute trainer in Robert McCracken, but the duo have their work cut out for them.

JAMES "BUDDY" MCGIRT

NICK POTTS

Was it really a shock that Ruiz upset Joshua? Yes and no, because I knew Ruiz was dangerous and I know that Joshua makes certain mistakes. Not major, but I knew that would cost him in the fight, and it did.

I can't reveal (what adjustments Joshua needs to make), but I just hope that he makes that adjustment. If he makes that adjustment, he beats him. If he doesn't make the adjustment, then we'll get a repeat of what we got the first time. I like Joshua; he's a very good fighter. He looks like a good athlete. I'm not knocking his trainer in no kind of way – I'm not knocking anybody, because that's not my style. But sometimes as an outsider looking in you see certain things.

I think (Joshua is) doing the right thing (by taking the immediate rematch). That's what champions do. If you fall off a bike, you don't go get another bike; you get right back up and ride that same one you fell off of.

When a guy realizes what he did wrong in the first fight, then in the second fight you put your heads together and you work on that. It makes it much easier, and you get the result that you want.

Make that little adjustment – I'm not gonna say big. That's all I'm gonna say. He's gotta make that little adjustment. If he makes that little adjustment, he'll be champion again. The key is to make Andy uncomfortable. That's one of the keys. RING

Jamel Herring focused years of heartbreak and frustration into the finest performance of his career, a disciplined boxing clinic against the aggressive (and odds favorite) Masayuki Ito on May 25 in Kissimmee, Florida. Herring won a clear unanimous decision and the WBO 130-pound title.

ON A MISSION

AFTER YEARS OF HIGHS AND LOWS IN AND OUT OF THE RING, MARINE **JAMEL HERRING** FINALLY GAINED A WORLD TITLE AGAINST **MASAYUKI ITO** AND NOW SEES HIMSELF ON THE PATH TO UNIFICATION

By **Michael Montero**

Many different paths lead fighters to glory in professional boxing. Jamel William Herring first laced up the gloves as a 15-year-old in 2001, and his life would never be the same. That same year, the 9/11 terrorist attacks left a profound impact on Herring and his best friend,

ON A MISSION

Stephen Brown. They grew up on Long Island, about 60 miles east of where the World Trade Center towers fell. Brown, a year older, enlisted in the Marine Corps fresh out of high school in 2002. Jamel followed in his footsteps the next year.

"If it wasn't for him, I probably would've never become a Marine and became the man I am today," Herring told The Ring. A year later, his best friend died from cancer. It was the first time young Jamel had dealt with personal tragedy. But he was a Marine now, and the mission always comes first, so he pushed on, carrying the memory of his friend and fellow Marine with him.

Over the next eight years, Herring balanced his responsibilities as an active-duty Marine and an amateur boxer. While on his first deployment in Fallujah, Iraq, his unit was able to arrange for a few boxing gloves and heavy bags to be shipped to the desert. Jamel used any free time he had to work out and stay sharp, but it was a challenge. He became a father during his second deployment in 2007, missing the birth of his son by two weeks. Jamel decided to name him Stephen in honor of his fallen friend. By then, he had earned his way onto the All-Marine Corps boxing team and was training consistently for the first time at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. His girlfriend would give birth to the couple's second child on May 25, 2009, a daughter they named Ariyanah.

"It was the first time I was able to witness one of my children being born," said Herring. "That was a huge moment in my life that I'll always cherish." But just when it felt like everything was falling into place, tragedy would strike again. On July 27, 2009, Jamel discovered a lifeless Ariyanah in her crib; she had quietly passed away from sudden infant death syndrome. "I tried to give her CPR," he said. "By the time the ambulance arrived, it was just too late. They couldn't do anything."

Ariyanah's death devastated Jamel and his family. But he was a Marine, and the mission always comes first, so he pushed on, carrying the memory of his daughter with him.

Herring, a tall, rangy southpaw, won a silver medal at the 2010 World Military Games and golds at the 2011 and 2012 Armed Forces Championships. After winning gold at the 2012 U.S. National Championships and bronze at the Americas Qualifiers, he earned a trip to the 2012 Olympic Games in London. He lost to Kazakhstan's Daniyar Yeleussinov, now a highly touted welterweight prospect, in the opening round. Later that year, Herring completed his military service and began his professional boxing career. He signed with adviser Al Haymon and fought on Golden Boy Promotions cards until Haymon launched the Premier Boxing Champions platform in 2015. Training camp was based in Cincinnati, Ohio, with Mike Stafford, who has trained notable fighters like Rau'shee Warren, Robert Easter Jr. and Adrien Broner.

After winning his first 15 pro bouts with 9 knockouts, Herring faced Russian lightweight contender Denis Shafikov. They headlined a PBC on ESPN card on July 2, 2016, that Jamel was added to on late notice.

"I only had a three-and-a-half-week training camp for that fight," he said. "And I found out later on that Shafikov had been preparing for that date long before I knew about it. I felt a little betrayed."

Although Herring's corner stopped the bout in the final round, he had some moments early on and proved that he had a fighter's heart. The more experienced Shafikov scored a knockdown in the second round and landed heavy punches throughout, but he couldn't put Herring away.

"I look at that fight as a blessing," said Herring. "It didn't break me. If anything, it made me mentally stronger. It taught me that I had to train that much more serious for that level of opponent."

After a comeback win against the rugged Art Hovhannisyan, Herring lost to the lightly regarded Ladarius Miller on a PBC card on Fox Sports 1 in August 2017. While he had a full camp to prepare for Miller, Jamel explains that it was chaotic and unfocused.

"Most of the attention went to Adrien Broner, who was preparing for Mikey Garcia at the time," he said. "I was left behind in Cincinnati while the team went to Colorado to train. I felt like my fight wasn't as important to them."

Herring was doing morning runs and work on the heavy bag at the gym by himself. "When you go into fights with that type of camp, you have doubt in your mind. That fight was the straw that broke the camel's back."

The two losses put Jamel Herring's boxing career at a crossroads. But he was a Marine and the mission always comes first, so he pushed on, carrying the lessons learned from those fights with him.

Before his bout with Miller, Herring had been invited to Terence Crawford's camp in Omaha, Nebraska, to serve as a sparring partner as "Bud" prepared for his unification fight with Julius Indongo. It was there that he first worked with Crawford's trainer, Brian "BoMac" McIntyre, and saw a new path. When his contract with Haymon/PBC ended in late 2017, Jamel began exploring his options and talked to several promoters.

"When I first signed with Haymon, it was pretty good," he said. "You have to remember, at that time Haymon was working with Golden Boy Promotions, so I was staying busy a lot. Later on, when he moved into the PBC direction, we weren't staying as busy. And for years I was trying to urge them to let me fight at 130 pounds, but due to business interests, I couldn't get a fight at that weight class. I felt like I was being set up to be a gatekeeper for their up-and-coming guys at 135."

Herring ultimately signed a promotional contract with Top Rank in early 2018. "They gave me the opportunity to move down to 130,

Win or lose, Herring displays as much grit as skill.

DYLAN BUELL

where I felt I would have a more dominant presence," he said. "They promised me a world title shot as long as I handled business on my end. They made me a priority."

His first bouts with Top Rank were on the undercards of the Jorge Linares-Vasiliy Lomachenko lightweight championship May 2018, Jose Ramirez-Antonio Orozco last September and the second Gilberto Ramirez-Jesse Hart fight last December. True to its word, Top Rank lined up Herring's first world title opportunity against Japan's Masayuki Ito next. The fight headlined a Top Rank on ESPN card on May 25, two days before Memorial Day and 10 years after, to the day, Jamel watched Ariyanah come into this world.

"Her 10th birthday is the day I fight for a world title, and the opening ceremony of the 2012 London games was the third anniversary of her passing," he told The Ring. "You can't write stuff like that. It reads straight out of a Hollywood script, but it was real life."

This time, there was no late-minute notice, no unfocused training camp. This time, Jamel Herring was the priority with no stone left unturned. This was his first full camp with Crawford's team, which included his strength and conditioning coach and nutritionist.

"I had a full eight-week training camp for the Ito fight; I covered everything that I needed to cover. We spent the first four weeks in Omaha, then the last four weeks in Colorado Springs for high-altitude training."

Herring says training in the mountains gave him the stamina he needed for his championship fight, but only because he cut it short.

"My coaches say 3-4 weeks is enough at high altitude," he said. "Anything longer and it can hurt your body. I think guys like (Gennady) Golovkin are wearing themselves out doing full camps at high altitude."

Coming in as a slight betting underdog, Herring used his superior height, reach and athleticism to outbox Ito over the 12-round distance. The Long Islander landed 146 of 528 total punches (28 percent) compared to Ito's 99 of 498 (20 percent), winning a unanimous decision to claim the WBO junior lightweight title. Minutes after his victory, dozens of Marines who were seated in the crowd joined Herring in the ring, creating an emotional scene that played out on national television.

"That was Top Rank working their magic," he said. "They set all of that up. I had no idea so many Marines would be there."

All those tough days on deployment in the Middle East, thousands of miles from home. All those tears shed thinking about Stephen and Ariyanah, all those punches to the head in sparring, all those doubters who piled on after the losses – it had all culminated into one beautiful night in Kissimmee, Florida.

"For that fight, I had everything I needed to succeed," said Herring (20-2, 10 KOs). "I put on the best performance to date in my career at a lower weight that people thought I couldn't even make. When I got into the ring, my mind was clear and I knew in my heart that I could win."

While many newly crowned champs would be doing talk shows and media events showing off their new belt, Jamel has been savoring the moment with his family, which never stopped growing over the years. He had a second son, Jamel Jr., in 2010 with the mother of Stephen and Ariyanah. They eventually split up and Herring began dating his childhood friend Jennifer, who had a daughter from a previous relationship named Karmen, now 14, whom Jamel raises as his own. In fact, Karmen changed her last name to Herring when her mother married Jamel in 2015. The couple have had two more children of their own: daughters Jazmyne (5) and Justice (2). It's a full household that commands a lot of attention, but the mission comes first and Herring knows the ring will be calling again soon.

"If I had it my way, a homecoming fight would be next," he said. "I would love to fight in the new Nassau Coliseum (in Long Island) that's been redesigned, or of course Madison Square Garden."

Herring would like two more fights in 2019 but understands that world titles bring complications. Several possibilities are being thrown around, including a date in November around the Marine Corps' birthday. But who will be the opponent?

Current WBC titleholder and The Ring's No. 1-rated junior lightweight, Miguel Berchelt (36-1, 32 KOs), attended the Ito-Herring fight. It was said that he would face the winner next, but it now appears that Berchelt may go in a different direction. Herring is not surprised.

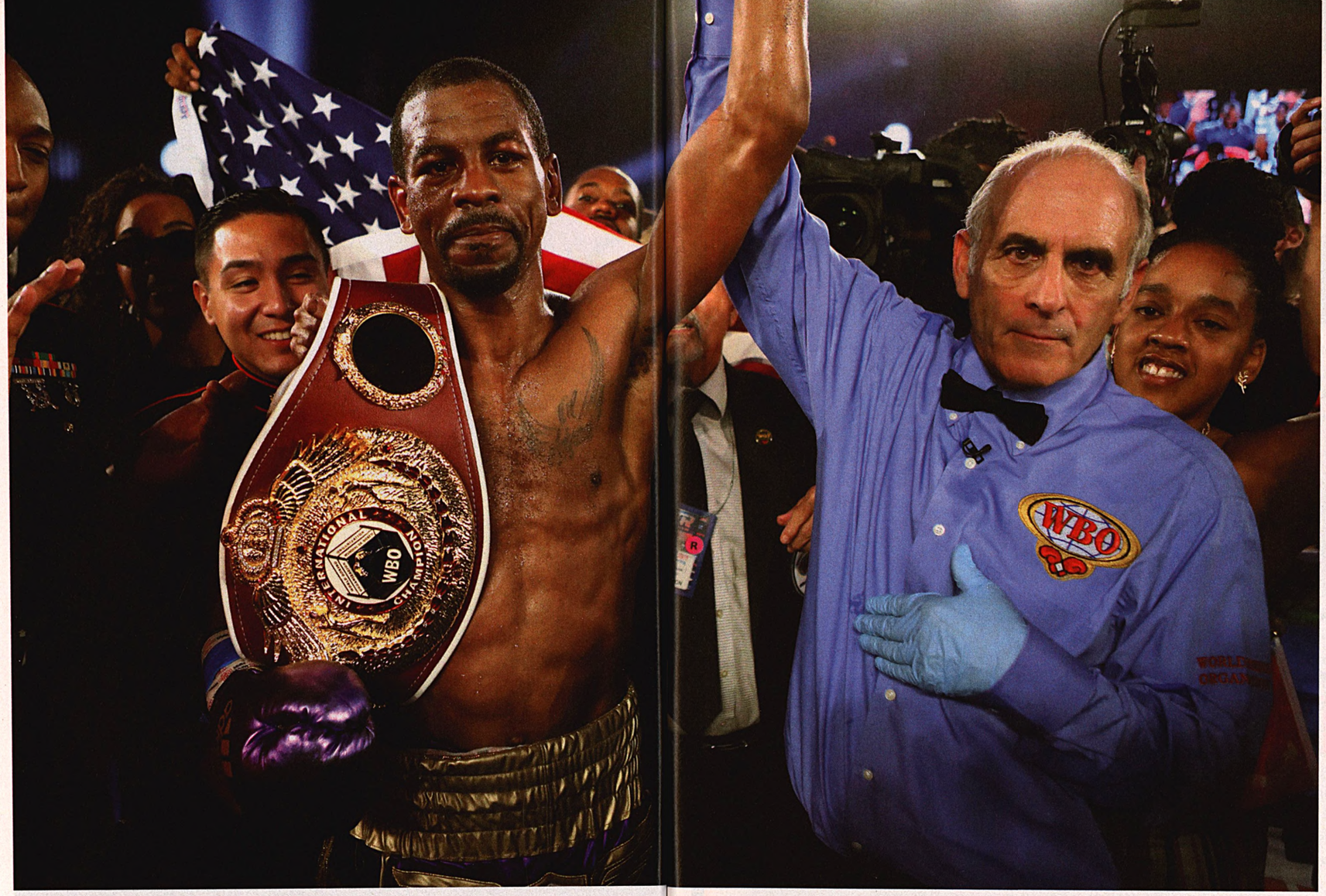
"I think his team had their mind set that Ito was going to beat me, and they'd face him next," he said. "My style is all wrong for Berchelt. All his recent opponents are flat-footed while I'm always moving, always turning."

The WBO currently rates Americans Lamont Roach Jr. (19-0-1, 7 KOs) and Joseph Diaz Jr. (29-1, 15 KOs), both of whom are promoted by Golden Boy, as their Nos. 1 and 4 contenders, respectively. Although those fights would be fairly easy to make politically and could be intriguing matchups, Herring makes it clear that he wants to unify titles and that network ties should not be an obstacle. He points to the upcoming junior welterweight title unification match between Jose Ramirez, who is represented by Top Rank and fights on ESPN, and Maurice Hooker, who is with Matchroom and fights on DAZN, as an example.

"Just look at Ramirez and Hooker," he said, "Top Rank is willing to work across the aisle. I'm a Marine first, and we don't run from anything. I've proved so many people wrong in the past year that I feel, 'Why stop now?' There are so many different titles now in each division, for a fighter to stand out they have to do something big. Everybody argues who is the best; a unified champion silences that noise."

So until his next mission, the Marine will be at home enjoying time with his family. But Jamel Herring wants fight fans to know that he remains as focused and hungry as ever. "I want to be known as a champion who is willing to put it all on the line. You don't see me being a diva on social media, calling out fighters and whatnot. I let my fighting do the talking, and I'm ready for everybody." RING

Michael Montero can be found on YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram via @MonteroOnBoxing. His weekly podcast, The Neutral Corner, can be heard on iTunes, iHeartRadio, Spotify and elsewhere.



The timing of Herring's victory was bittersweet, as it fell on his late daughter's birthday.

ALEX MENENDEZ

NONITO DONAIRE: FILIPINO FLASHBACKS

FROM FLYWEIGHT TO FEATHERWEIGHT, **NONITO DONAIRE** RECALLS HIS BEST WINS

By **Tom Gray**

Every bantamweight who entered the World Boxing Super Series did so with the view of building a legacy – with the exception of one.

Nonito Donaire entered the white-hot elimination tournament as a four-weight world titleholder with Hall of Fame credentials. "The Filipino Flash" simply sought a new challenge because he's a warrior, because he loves the sport, and because he wants to add more icing to his cake. Donaire doesn't need to build a legacy; that was secure a long time ago.

It was in July 2007 that Donaire announced himself at the elite level, knocking out previously unbeaten IBF flyweight titleholder Vic Darchinyan with a left-hook counter from hell in Round 5. Multiple belts followed at bantamweight, junior featherweight and featherweight. Such was the quality of Donaire's performances that he was a permanent fixture in the top five of any pound-for-pound list worth reading.

Of course, there was adversity. Donaire dropped a unanimous decision to Cuban defensive wizard Guillermo Rigondeaux in April 2013, and there was a brutal sixth-round stoppage defeat at the hands of then-unbeaten power-puncher Nicholas Walters 18 months later.

But you can't keep a good man down.

Donaire rebounded to recapture his old WBO junior featherweight title with a 12-round unanimous decision over Cesar Juarez in December 2015, and although he lost on points to Jessie Magdaleno and Carl Frampton, it is interesting to note that the 36-year-old boxer-puncher has never lost a fight at the bantamweight limit.

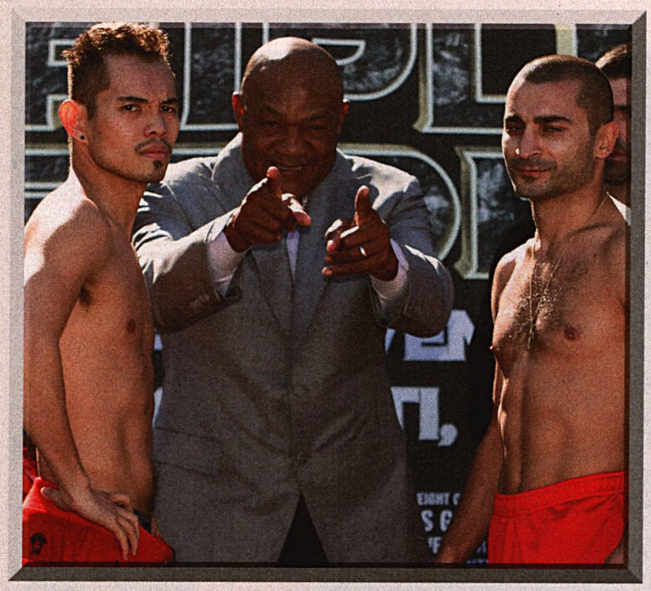
"I feel amazing at this weight class," Donaire told The Ring. "My speed is back, and I have a lot of confidence. I made a great decision to go back to the weight I felt comfortable at. Making the bantamweight limit is actually quite easy for me."

In his first WBSS appearance, Donaire claimed the WBA 118-pound title with a fourth-round stoppage of Ryan Burnett (the Belfast man suffered a back injury in what was shaping up to be a competitive fight). In his first defense, he produced a spectacular sixth-round knockout of Stephon Young (who replaced an injured Zolani Tete) to secure himself a place in the tournament final against Ring Magazine champion and IBF titleholder Naoya Inoue later this year.

"It's a fight that's been called for," said Donaire, who feels that this particular matchup was predestined. "The best thing I can do is fight the best, and people look at Naoya in that light. People look at me in a different light because of what I've done in heavier divisions. But this is the best fight, and it had to happen. It had to be him and it had to be me. That's something that I'm sincerely happy about. No other opponent could make me feel the way I do – so focused – because the guy in front of me is much more dangerous than the other guys in the tournament.

"It doesn't matter to me (that I'm the underdog). I've nothing to prove to anyone else. It's something that I've learned: No matter what you do, there's always someone that's just gonna write you off. Granted, the guy in front of me is Inoue, but that makes me train even harder. It's more about what happens after the fact, when victory is there and the jaw drops to the floor. That's my visualization in this whole tournament. I welcome everyone's opinion, but I'll work hard and do what I do best."

There could be more glory in the future for one of the very best fighters of a generation, but Donaire was kind enough to go back in time with The Ring and review some of his past triumphs. »

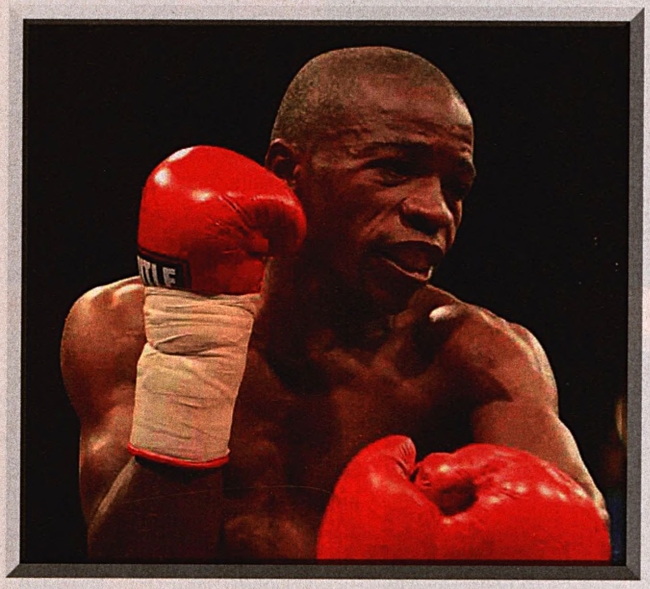


VIC DARCHINYAN

July 7, 2007/Harbor Yard Arena, Bridgeport, Connecticut • Titles: IBF flyweight

"He walked into the press conference with this Australian helmet and said even with me wearing a helmet I was going to get destroyed. To me, from that point, I just turned on the switch and wanted to hurt this guy. When I came to the ring, all I could think about was hurting him, and that took some of the pressure off me winning the belt. In the moment when I knocked him down, I still wanted to destroy this guy. I wanted him to get up so I could knock him down again. When I realized that I'd knocked him out, it was such a release and I just jumped around like a crazed madman. 'Oh my God, I'm world champion.'"

RESULT: DONAIRE TKO 5



MORUTI MTHALANE

November 1, 2008/Mandalay Bay Events Center, Las Vegas • Titles: IBF flyweight

"Moruti was a guy who was gonna come at me, so the plan was to box, box, box. But things happen, and on the week of the fight, I suffered an asthma attack and this fight was gonna be called off. It was a very bad attack and I couldn't take any inhalers (because of testing). My doctor told me to pull out, but we went ahead with it. In the fight, I was cracking him with good punches when he was coming in, but my lungs were going; I could feel it. Somehow luck was in my favor. I hit him and opened up his eye, and I'd never seen an injury like that before. I was willing to give him a rematch, but we decided to move up in weight."

RESULT: DONAIRE TKO 6

FERNANDO MONTIEL

February 19, 2011/ Mandalay Bay Events Center, Las Vegas • Titles: WBC/WBO bantamweight

"I trained really hard, and it was one of the most nerve-racking fights of my professional career. I knew the guy was really tough and anything could happen. But on the week of the fight, I started studying him more and realized something. I saw something in his style. And this is strange, but I told my guys, 'I'm gonna knock him out in the second round.' They're like, 'What?' I said, 'The moment I get his distance, I can land the biggest punch, because his head is right there.' I told my guys to bet on the second round, and they won a few thousand dollars. It's the only time in my career I've predicted something like that. I was very confident of pulling it off."

RESULT: DONAIRE TKO 2

OMAR NARVAEZ

October 22, 2011/Theater at Madison Square Garden, New York • Titles: WBC/WBO bantamweight

"I couldn't land really well, but I knew I was winning the fight anyway. I didn't pursue (the stoppage) too much. If there was animosity between us, then I would probably have kept pushing and pushing for that knockout. But it became a very easy night. He was undefeated at that time, and I figured his record was important to him and that he would open himself up. Throughout the night, I just kept waiting for something that didn't happen. He knew he was losing. His main goal going into the fight was to survive Nonito Donaire. That's what he said in Spanish, so I read him well."

RESULT: DONAIRE UD 12

WILFREDO VAZQUEZ JR.

February 4, 2012/Alamodome, San Antonio, Texas • Titles: WBO junior featherweight

"He pushed me at the press conference before the fight, and I pushed him back. At that moment, we were about to go at it, and that's the only time during my career that I've almost had a scuffle outside of the ring. I wasn't just going to back off. I'm a fighter, and I always conduct myself well, but if you put yourself in that territory, in my zone, if you're getting in my space, then that's a different story. It could be a punch in the face. It could be a kick in the leg. I don't know. (laughs) Just be aware that I'm gonna hit something. I'm not a pushover when someone tries to bully me. Also, the Vazquez fight wasn't close; I won more rounds, and the (split) decision baffled me."

RESULT: DONAIRE SD 12

TOSHIAKI NISHIOKA

October 13, 2012/Home Depot Center, Carson, California • Titles: Ring and WBO junior featherweight

"I had a lot of respect for Nishioka. He was a great fighter, and he had a lot of power in his hands. I trained really hard for that fight and was really pleased with my preparation. I thought he was the best in the division, so I trained as hard as I possibly could. I was also looking to leave the sport around that time. I'd had an easy night against Jeffrey Mathebula, but going to the gym was becoming a chore for me. It was actually the Nishioka fight that got me back up, because I had to really focus for the opponent. I studied him, and everything in the game plan worked. They were expecting the hooks, but it was the straight right hands that really opened him up – and the uppercuts."

RESULT: TKO 9

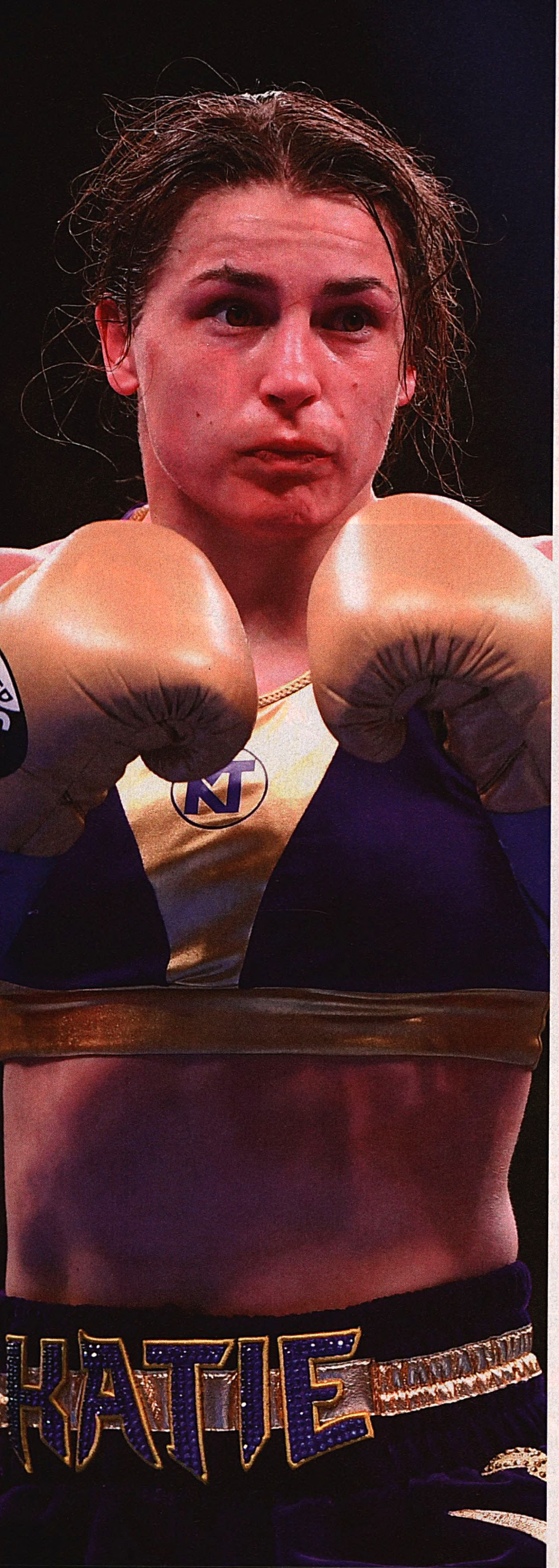
CESAR JUAREZ

December 11, 2015/Coliseo Roberto Clemente, San Juan, Puerto Rico • Titles: Vacant WBO junior featherweight

"A lot of emotion went into that fight. I'd dropped him (twice in Round 4), but somewhere around the fifth or sixth, I twisted my ankle really bad. I was limping and it hurt when I pushed off it, which diminished my power. The guy was really tough, and he kept coming and coming. From the eighth round to the 10th round, my body and mind was saying, 'Man, you've done enough. You don't need to prove anything else.' My mind was telling me to call it a night, and I was like, 'Get the hell outta here!' That's not me. You've gotta take me out for me to be defeated. I gave it all I had in the last couple of rounds, and that shows the faith I have in myself. It was tough, but that fight gave me the ray of light that I needed. I got the win, but I knew I could be even better."

RESULT: UD 12

BRAEKHUS: JOHN MCCOY/GETTY IMAGES;



THREE QUEENS

THREE UNDISPUTED CHAMPIONS – **CECILIA BRAEKHUS, CLARESSA SHIELDS** AND **KATIE TAYLOR** – LEAD WHAT IS BEGINNING TO LOOK LIKE A GOLDEN AGE OF WOMEN'S BOXING

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

It's been rumored for years. Maybe "hoped for" is the better term. But all of a sudden, seemingly out of nowhere, women's boxing is in a better place than it's ever been. Fights are making their way to premium cable and streaming networks, media coverage is more prevalent than ever and there are three – three – undisputed world champions.

And as Cecilia Braekhus, Claressa Shields and Katie Taylor reign over their respective divisions, dare we say that we're in a Golden Age for the ladies?

"I do think so," said John David Jackson, a retired two-division titleholder who currently trains middleweight champion Shields. "You had pretty good fighters in the past, but they didn't get the notoriety that they probably deserved. This time around, they got a better deal. They get more notoriety and the girls are willing to fight each other. Not saying that they weren't willing back then, but now the money's a little better. It's not great, but it's better

Cecilia Braekhus (left) has been undisputed welterweight champ since 2014. Claressa Shields (center) and Katie Taylor (right) joined the "First Lady" of women's boxing by unifying all four belts in their divisions (middleweight and lightweight) in 2019.

than what it was, so they're willing to fight each other now more than they were before."

Johnathon Banks, trainer of welterweight champion Braekhus, agrees, but not without giving some past greats their just due.

"Not only is it a golden age, but you have to give a shout out to Laila Ali, Christy Martin, Ann Wolfe and Lucia Rijker, because these women have truly paved the way for females to continue to do the sport."

Banks is right, but so is Jackson when it comes to the willingness of today's best of the best to let their fists do the talking. Of the four standouts Banks mentioned, the only ones to fight each other were Ali and Martin, and that 2003 bout took place when "The Coal Miner's Daughter" was on the downside of her career and 20 pounds north of her best weight.

But in 2019 alone, Shields unified the 160-pound crown with an April win over Christina Hammer, and Taylor did the same at 135 pounds in June when she won an instant classic over Delfine Persoon. As for Norway's Braekhus, she's been defending all the belts at 147 pounds since 2014, making her the senior member of this exclusive club. And if her three wins in 2018 – over Kali Reis, Inna Sagaydakovskaya and Aleksandra Magdziak Lopes – are any indication, the 35-0 "First Lady" isn't slowing down at 37 years old.

"She keeps her focus because she has this desire to continue to stay on top and continue to win," said Banks. "It's her attitude, her persona, and whatever you've seen that makes some of the best male champions, the females also have it. It's just that sometimes it's overlooked because this dynamic competitive edge is in the form of a female body. Either way, I think it's awesome."

Thankfully, the same folks that believed women couldn't compete on the elite level like their male counterparts are starting to fade into the background, and while equitable money still isn't there yet, it's starting to get better. As for the talent at the pro level, it's higher than it's ever been, and Ross Enamait, The Ring Trainer of the Year in women's boxing for 2018 thanks to his work with Taylor, believes it has everything to do with the influx of fighters with extensive amateur experience.

"Katie's got an amateur pedigree, so she's been in there with every style," Enamait said of the 2012 Olympic gold medalist from Ireland. "There's nothing that she hasn't seen. It's obviously changing, but some of the girls that are professional in America don't have the amateur background. So they turned pro with 20 or 30 amateur fights and are kind of learning on the job. Katie had 250 amateur fights, so she's already seen everything. She's been to all these international competitions and had to wait in the dressing room 250 times to where it's not as nerve-racking for her to walk out there as it is for someone who had 20 amateur fights and all of a sudden they're fighting for a title. So the amateur

Braekhus (above), unbeaten in 35 fights (25 title bouts), was awarded The Ring's women's pound-for-pound champion belt in 2018. Shields and Taylor (next page) earned The Ring's inaugural women's middleweight and lightweight championship titles this year.

BRAEKHUS: JOHN MCCOY/GETTY IMAGES;

pedigree is huge."

Shields would agree, and there may be no more decorated United States amateur – male or female – than the Flint, Michigan, native who went 77-1 with two Olympic gold medals before turning pro in 2016. That experience allowed her to hit the ground running in the punch-for-pay ranks, and by her fourth fight, she had a pair of super middleweight world titles.

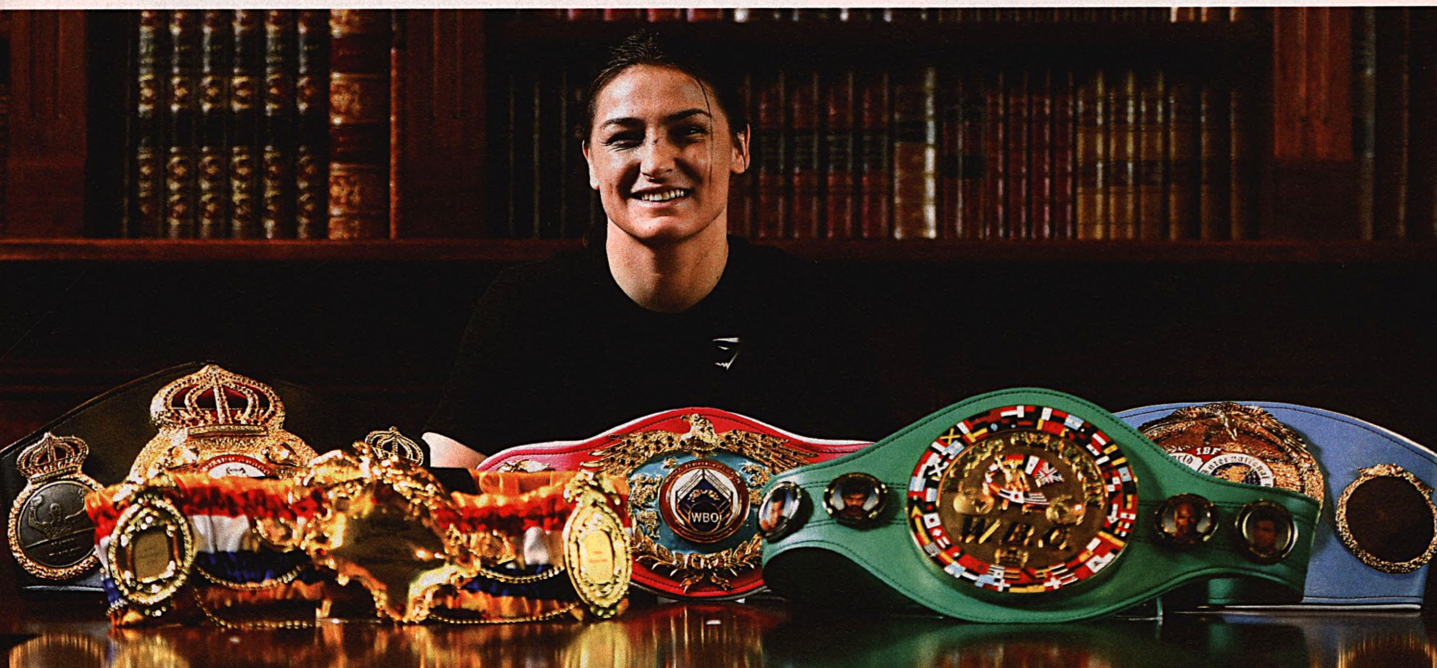
Yet while Shields was as dominant as a pro as she was in the amateurs, belts weren't enough for "T-Rex," who made it very clear that she wanted to be the best woman to ever lace up the gloves. That led her to Florida and Jackson, a move that clearly showed her commitment to getting better.

"Once I got called about working with her, I did my research, looked her up and I saw what she needed," said Jackson. "She got in the ring and showed me what she had, and I just took it from there. I just worked off what she needed as far as getting her to become a better fighter. She knew how to fight before I met her. I just had to hone her skills and make her become a better-seasoned professional fighter."

Shields and Jackson are 4-0 together, and they've added four more belts and a Ring championship along the way.

"It's her overall attitude," said Jackson. "She goes into every fight believing that she's the best, and if you're gonna beat her, you gotta prove it to her. You can't talk about it; you gotta do it."

Shields was scheduled to drop down in weight to face Ivana Habazin on August 17 for the vacant WBO junior middleweight title, but a knee injury suffered while running in late June will likely push what was to be a Showtime-televised homecoming bout in Flint, Michigan, to the fall. The 24-year-old may have other options by that time, but her desire to make boxing history by becoming a three-division world titleholder with the fewest number of fights probably ensures that she will focus on the 154-pound division. If and when she does, it will be her first attempt at making the weight, and the world



will be watching.

"I wouldn't say it's easy, but in her mind it's makeable, and that's all that counts if she wants to do it," said Jackson. "I think those last few pounds won't be easy, but they won't be super hard. She's very disciplined when it comes to making weight; she just needs the right diet regimen. And if she's as strong as she needs to be, then 154 will be a nice little place for her to reside for two or three fights and then get the hell out of there."

Of course, it's a pivotal move, because while the trio of Shields, Braekhus and Taylor are making history in their own lanes, the matchmaker in all of us wants to see what would happen if the modern greats faced off in the ring.

Shields-Taylor is off the table, but there has been talk of Braekhus moving up to 154 while Shields moves down, and there is always the possibility of Taylor moving up for Braekhus. But not to 147 pounds.

"Going to '47 is a stretch," admits Enamait. "It would probably have to be at a catchweight of 141 pounds or something. But (welterweight) is a long way. (Taylor) is not even a big lightweight, so to go up two weight classes is a huge jump."

As for Braekhus, Banks doesn't know if either superfight can materialize.

"If she desires to, she will, but she's not gonna be comfortable at 154," said Banks. "Out of shape, she's 150. Cecilia has no body fat; she's a small fighter at 147. She's not a physically big girl. And I've told Claressa to her face: 'I mean no disrespect by saying that you're physically bigger than her.' That's just physics. Nobody can do anything about that.

"There's a lot of talk about that fight (with Shields)," Banks continues before asking a question:

"Who would this fight benefit more? Claressa's side or Cecilia's side?"

Probably Shields' side, considering that the two-division champ is still building her resume while Braekhus' legacy is already secure.

"That's what I wanted you to say, so I didn't have to," said Banks, whose fighter has not only made history in the ring, but out of it as

well, as she played an instrumental role in getting the ban on professional boxing lifted in Norway in 2016.

In short, there's nothing left to prove for Braekhus, but she still wants more, telling The Ring in 2018, "I think every fighter just wants to be tested sometime to the point where they have to go to reach somewhere they haven't been and see what's inside them and what can be brought to life. And the only way you can do that is with an opponent who can push you this far. I haven't found that opponent yet, and I would love to have that. I think that's something that I want to happen and what needs to happen."

For three diverse personalities such as Braekhus, Shields and Taylor, that above sentiment is a common thread. Braekhus hasn't found the Joe Frazier to her Muhammad Ali yet. Shields thought she found her great rival in Hammer but went on to dominate their highly anticipated bout. As for Taylor, the 32-year-old may have her rival in the form of Belgium's Persoon, who pushed the Bray native to the limit in their Madison Square Garden bout. Yet despite eking out a close (and many would say controversial) decision, Taylor and her team made it clear that they want to run it back.

"There are a lot of reasons why I think the fight would make sense," said Enamait. "Speaking from my perspective as a coach, I'd love the rematch. On the night of the fight, that wasn't our best fight. But at the same time, I think that was the best fight you'll ever see Persoon put on. We can box her and win decisively in a rematch; we'll never see a better version of Delfine Persoon. That wasn't the best version of Katie. We can be a lot better and we are a lot better, and I think a rematch would be more decisive."

There's the secret. The great fighters want to fight the tough fights against the best opposition. Sometimes boxing politics or simple physical issues prevent these bouts from happening, but as long as the desire is there, that makes all the difference.

"You're not gonna typically see that on the men's side," Enamait said. "There's too many negotiations that break down and you've got competing networks, where you don't really have that as much with the females. They're willing to get in there with anybody."

The Three Queens have proven it, making the idea of a golden age as real as it's ever been. But Enamait believes this is just the start.

"It's definitely a golden age as far as what it's been thus far," he said. "But I think it will get bigger. Now you've got undisputed champions, you've got women who are getting all these headlines and you're gonna have more girls in the gym and the amateur pedigree is gonna rise, which is gonna eventually lead to better pros. We're in a golden age, but I wouldn't be surprised if it gets a lot higher in 10 or 15 years."

Despite being 37, Braekhus' biggest fights lie ahead; a catchweight showdown vs. Taylor is a possibility. Taylor, who struggled to beat Delfine Persoon (previous page), has options in and around her division, including a rematch. Shields, who has dominated her competition, isn't as lucky.

ENTER THE OCTAGON

BY GARETH A DAVIES

Romero with UFC president Dana White after a 2018 title fight.

A LAWSUIT WORTH MILLIONS WENT HIS WAY, BUT YOEL ROMERO INSISTS CLEARING HIS NAME IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN MONEY

UFC middleweight fighter Yoel Romero failed a drug test in 2016. The Cuban, whose cage sobriquet is "Soldier of God" to honor his devotion to his religion, was beside himself. Social media trolls had labeled him "Soldier of Steroids." It hurt.

In a sport that was once riddled with performance-enhancing substances, Romero knew he was innocent. He filed a lawsuit in New Jersey against Gold Star Performance Products, claiming the test results were caused by a tainted product containing a banned substance – ibutamoren, a growth hormone stimulant – which led to a six-month suspension by the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA). (Romero was granted a light suspension time and not fined because USADA had his supplement tested and ibutamoren was found, even though the banned substance was not listed on the label.) The court ruled in favor of the 42-year-old veteran and awarded him damages amounting to $27.45 million.

The breakdown of the damages amounted to $3 million for lost wages, $3 million for harm to his reputation and $3 million for emotional and psychological damage. Said damages are tripled under New Jersey law when a company has committed consumer fraud. Romero may never see a cent of that award, but it doesn't matter to him. The important issue was that his name was cleared.

"I was very happy. It was not about the money," he said. "I couldn't sleep at night. It's very emotional and important, too, because I know I've never taken anything in my life."

Romero, ranked No. 2 in the division – not richer in the pocket, yet vindicated – is scheduled to return to the UFC's Octagon on August 17 against Paulo Costa in Anaheim.

★ ★ ★

ILIMA-LEI MACFARLANE MAY LOOK TO POLITICS AFTER FIGHTING CAREER

Ilima-Lei Macfarlane has already developed a reputation as a special character – not just in fight sports, but beyond. The Bellator flyweight champion – whose high school in Honolulu is the alma mater of former POTUS Barack Obama – has a master's degree in social anthropology and is already working with indigenous tribeswomen in the U.S., but told me that within 10 years, she may go into politics.

"In 10 years, I hope to be a homeowner, have a child and own my business, and be commentating for Bellator," said Macfarlane, who took up mixed martial arts "because I was overweight at college" and has already become one of the most formidable female champions the sport has ever seen.

"Politics might be an option as well … but to be totally honest, I don't know if I'm qualified," she told me on a whistlestop visit to London recently. "But who knows what can happen in 10 years."

Macfarlane will make the fourth

defense of the Bellator 125-pound title in her native Hawaii in December.

"She's grown so much in the last year, and she'll continue to shine," Scott Coker, president of Bellator MMA, commented. "When you talk to her, she's very impressive. She's serious about a lot of passionate projects. I connect the dots with her. Really, it goes back to her roots in Hawaii. How can we take care of the people and the land? That'll be her mission statement in life, and she'll have a bigger voice even after fighting. People respect her and it's not fake; she's real.

"Her messaging and her beliefs are from a person way beyond her years. But she likes to scrap. She is a product of our system to sign and cultivate fighters."

★ ★ ★

COKER: WE SHOULD HAVE BELLATOR AND UFC UNIFICATION FIGHTS

Where boxing has unification fights, MMA rarely does so, given the nature of the sport and competing fight leagues. But Coker believes it can – and should – be done. He has already tried it, with Rizin fighter Kyoji Horiguchi matched against American Darrion Caldwell, the Bellator bantamweight king. Or ex-king, as Horiguchi has beaten Caldwell twice, the second time at Madison Square Garden on June 14, a night when champion Rory MacDonald also advanced to Bellator's welterweight Grand Prix tournament final in a rematch with Douglas Lima.

"No one's doing this. If UFC wanted to do it, I'd put my boys in in a second," explained Coker. "Win, lose or draw – that's what sportsmanship is about. What about (Bellator's) Ryan Bader against (UFC's) Daniel Cormier? That has never happened. Win, lose or draw, I would do it. Here is the one caveat: It's not their business model, and I totally get it. But if they wanted to get it on, we would do it.

"That's what people want to see. I want to see (Bellator's) MVP (Michael "Venom" Page) fight (UFC's) Robbie Lawler. Why not? I don't put it past him to beat his ass. I don't know if there's many UFC people that I want. I would definitely take Nick or Nate Diaz, Conor McGregor and Jon Jones. We have big stars too, but those guys are megastars. There's only a handful of fighters I'd take."

On that note, the winner of Nate Diaz and Anthony Pettis at UFC 241 could provide the next opponent for McGregor, who has not fought since his defeat to Khabib Nurmagomedov last October but is expected to make his walk again late in 2019.

JEFF BOTTARI

Nunes advises girlfriend Nina Ansaroff between rounds of a strawweight bout at UFC 238.

★ ★ ★

AMANDA NUNES: BREAKING GROUND AND ALL COMERS

And finally ... serious plaudits must go to Brazilian fighter Amanda Nunes, the 31-year-old UFC bantamweight and featherweight champion, who picked up several gongs at the prestigious industry Fighters Only World MMA Awards ceremony in Las Vegas early in July.

Nunes inked herself as the greatest female fighter of all time with her 51-second demolition of Cristiane Cyborg Santos as last year closed, going up a division to claim the 145-pound belt against her bullish compatriot, winning the vote of the fans, proving her popularity and worth to the UFC.

In two years, Nunes has victories over Santos, Ronda Rousey, Valentina Shevchenko and Miesha Tate, and has lost just once in the last six years. Nunes has played her part in the recent focus on gender equality and respect in the sport; women's MMA remains an example for other industries.

"I always remind people that Gina Carano and Cyborg Santos sold out (the arena) in San Jose. That was the first female main event on a major network. We promoted it and it was the first female fight in the States. We've been doing women's fights for years; it's always been exciting in my opinion," reckons Coker. "It's just that people are now noticing it." RING

Gareth A Davies is boxing correspondent for The London Telegraph.

WORLD BEAT

Anthony Joshua's loss was a setback for the British star, but boxing remains strong in the U.K.

U.K.

BY GARETH A DAVIES

You know boxing is huge when Liverpool Football Club wins the European Champions League final on Saturday afternoon and on Sunday morning the defeat of a heavyweight dominates the news. Anthony Joshua's loss to Andy Ruiz Jr. – while a terrible setback for the Adonis-like heavyweight himself – simply showed the measure of just how resonant boxing is in the U.K. at present.

Robert Smith, secretary of the British Boxing Board of Control, told me recently that there are record numbers of shows up and down the country. For example, in March this year, there were 46 shows alone. Forty-six in one calendar month! We are only a little island, yet the land is replete with the sweet science. In fact, as A.J. Liebling – a Thucydides of our sport and a personal fistic and linguistic inspiration – wrote that he once reveled with the writers and the fans in the U.K. in the '50s and '60s, soaking up the love of "fisticular" action.

It is arguably better now than at any time. The heavyweights, of course, are largely responsible. As any true fan knows: There is boxing, and there is heavyweight boxing. And we have a fine crop of heavyweights at present, potentially having up to five of the top 10 in the next year or so. Tyson Fury, Joshua and Dillian Whyte, possibly Nathan Gorman and Daniel Dubois. Time will tell on the latter pair. But the trickle-down effect at present has created a conveyor belt of talent and interest. Joshua may have lost, but the band plays on.

★★★

'BILLION-DOLLAR WAR'

Barry Hearn begat Matchroom Sport Boxing. And Eddie Hearn. Barry sees these times as special. He told me recently: "Everything is good in British boxing at the moment. We've got three of the top four heavyweights in the world, which has never been done before. It's a wonderful time, so let's keep it going."

Hearn Sr. also feels that the U.K. market has had a major impact across The Pond. "Boxing has exploded in the USA – I have to say mainly on the emergence of Eddie as the top promoter in the U.K. and because of DAZN, who have lots of money. The incumbents, the ones who were there before, don't want to lose their high ground, so they're involved in this billion-dollar war involving Wilder and Fury.

"Although the fans don't want to hear it, boxing is about money. The boxers benefit from that, but the fans don't want to hear it.

"I think Anthony Joshua has got another seven or eight years to become a global star; that's his brief. His brand value escalates daily, but you cannot ignore America. It's the biggest market in the world."

★★★

Tyson Fury calls him his "counselor," but the Gypsy King can thank his guardian angels for Ben Davison. "He's got a flamboyant style and personality. That shows in his performances,

his ringwalk and media work. It's just him expressing who he is in and out of the ring," explained Davison post Fury-Schwarz about his charge, whose 144-pound weight loss and full crooning voice were available for all to see and hear in Las Vegas. "What you have seen physically is only a fraction of the transformation that took place. In his previous career, as he put it, Tyson was putting on an act. I don't think the public warmed to that. Maybe the public sensed that wasn't who he is. Deep down he's a good person, and that always shines through."

The 26-year-old Davison's role never stops. "I'm organizer, PR man, commercial manager, partly his manager, partly his adviser – every single part of his world, I play a part in. But he puts his trust in me, trusts my opinion, and that's just the relationship we've developed. The key is that I'm not a 'yes' man for him, either."

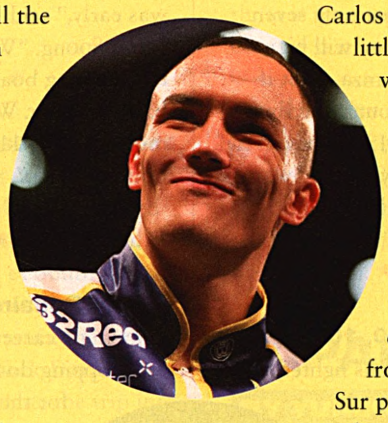
Davison is happy to counsel Fury to be a better, happier human being. "If Tyson cleaned up this era, what would it all be for? It would mean nothing, because he'd be straight back to where he was. The biggest achievement is him knowing what he needs to be well, and that means more to me. And more to his family than winning 300 million fights."

In the view of this columnist, Fury should have been reinstated as the Ring Magazine champion.

★★★

Josh Warrington retained the IBF featherweight crown with a split decision over Barry Awad, aka Kid Galahad, in a scrappy matchup in Leeds. Galahad smartly slowed the pace of the fight with clever footwork, but it was the titleholder's work rate that caught the eye of the judges, as the all-Yorkshire affair went to the Leeds fighter rather than the Sheffield man. With a score of 115-113 from judge Howard Foster for Galahad and cards of 116-112 and 116-113 returned for the incumbent by Steve Gray and Michael Alexander respectively, Warrington made a successful second defense of the crown he took from Lee Selby last year – the first being an all-action thriller against Carl Frampton.

This was by no means an exciting affair – scrappy at best with holding all the way through, which nullified most of Warrington's work. Referee Phil Edwards had to pull the two men apart time and again. "I hope it's on to America next. I've beaten Selby, Frampton and now Barry, and it feels like I should fight one of the champions next. It has to be now," said Warrington. He certainly deserves a unification match with the likes of Leo Santa Cruz or Oscar Valdez.



Warrington won an ugly match.

★★★

Finally, Katie Taylor has agreed to a rematch with Delfine Persoon after the former WBC lightweight titleholder filed an official appeal of her controversial defeat by the Irish fighter. It looked like a terrible decision from my seat ringside. Persoon's physicality was admirable. Taylor, clearly the better boxer, was drawn too often into a close-quarters battle. But credit to Taylor for agreeing. Taylor's promoter, Eddie Hearn, suggested that a rematch would go ahead to "set the record straight." Right now the record books have Taylor as the unified lightweight beltholder and Ring Magazine champion with a professional record of 14-0.

Cheers.

Gareth A Davies is boxing correspondent for The London Telegraph.

PHILIPPINES

BY RYAN SONGALIA

The situation was out of Genisis Libranza's hands when his fight on the Manny Pacquiao-Adrien Broner undercard was canceled this past January. His opponent, Carlos Buitrago, showed little interest in making weight for the junior bantamweight fight, coming in at 121 pounds – about six pounds heavier than Libranza. The flyweight contender from Agusan del Sur province was disappointed but stuck around in the States to fight a couple weeks later in Carson, California, outpointing Gilberto Mendoza on the Gervonta Davis-Hugo Ruiz card in front of a much smaller crowd than he'd have seen in Vegas.

Libranza (18-1, 10 KOs) will get another chance to fight on a card headlined by his promoter (Pacquiao) when he faces Carlos Maldonado (11-3, 7 KOs) on the Pacquiao-Keith Thurman card on July 20 at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas. The 25-year-old will be going for his eighth-straight win since a 2017 KO loss to Moruti Mthalane, while Maldonado, who has never been stopped, is coming off a decision loss to McWilliams Arroyo in February.

"It's an honor for me that I will be fighting on Manny's undercard," said Libranza, who is training with Pacquiao assistant Nonoy Neri at the Wild Card Boxing Club in Hollywood. Libranza's MP Promotions stablemate Jayar Inson (18-2, 12 KOs) will also be in action on the card against Mahonri Montes (35-9-1, 24 KOs) in what should be a welterweight shootout. Inson lost an entertaining split decision

RICHARD HEATHCOTE

to Jonathan Steele on the Pacquiao-Broner card, while Montes has lost two straight.

Despite betting odds favoring the unbeaten Thurman, Libranza believes his 40-year-old promoter will walk out on top.

"Probably it will last only seven rounds, because Manny will hit him easily," said Libranza. "But if Thurman will run around the ring, it could last the whole 12 rounds. If he fights Manny the way Manny wants to fight, it'll end in a knockout."

★★★

Samuel Salva (17-0, 10 KOs), another MP Promotions fighter, will get home-court advantage when he gets his title shot against IBF strawweight beltholder DeeJay Kriel. The fight will take place on August 24 in Metro Manila, according to MP Promotions matchmaker Sean Gibbons.

Samuel Salva will get his first title shot in August.

The 22-year-old Salva, from Misamis Oriental province, ascended to mandatory status after outpointing compatriot Rene Mark Cuarto in an eliminator in March and has fought all of his bouts so far in the Philippines. Kriel (15-1-1, 7 KOs) of Johannesburg, South Africa, won the title in dramatic fashion in February, dropping Carlos Licona three times in the 12th round.

★★★

Aston Palicte fell short in his second opportunity at the WBO junior bantamweight title, stopped in Round 10 by Kazuto Ioka on June 19 with the vacant belt on the line. The fight was in Chiba City, Japan, and had its moments, with Palicte piling up the offense in Round 7 before Ioka's body work began to make an impression on Palicte's long torso. The fight was stopped midway through the 10th after Ioka landed a flurry of blows that sent Palicte reeling. All three scorecards had the Japanese fighter ahead.

"I think he fought well early on, aside from thinking the stoppage was early," said Palicte's manager, Jason Soong. "We're going back to the drawing board and will come back stronger. We can also explore moving up to 118 if there are good options there."

★★★

Nonito Donaire has been enjoying a career renaissance since dropping down to bantamweight for the World Boxing Super Series, even if his opponents have been cursed by injuries along the way. He picked up the WBA belt when Ryan Burnett went down with an injury in Round 4, then saw his unification bout with WBO titleholder Zolani Tete canceled when Tete went down with tendinitis. Stephon Young stepped in on short notice and was knocked out cold in six rounds in April. Donaire will get a chance to show that his reemergence isn't a fluke when he faces pound-for-pound elite member and newly crowned Ring champion and IBF beltholder Naoya Inoue in the finals. Donaire is already heading to the Hall of Fame, but his resume will be boosted even further if he pulls this off against an unbeaten champ 10 years his junior.

★★★

In what will be hard to top for Philippine Fight of the Year, Romero Duno rescued his winning streak with a ninth-round technical decision against Juan Antonio Rodriguez on May 16 in Indio, California. Duno (20-1, 15 KOs) appeared sluggish at times and was an inviting target for Rodriguez's heavy hands, but he began to come alive in the middle rounds, dropping the Mexican in the eighth on a body shot. The ending was confusing: Referee Raul Caiz Jr. exchanged words with Rodriguez after he was knocked down but did not confer with a ringside doctor before deciding on his own that a cut opened up by a headbutt under Rodriguez's eye was enough to stop the fight and let the scorecards determine the outcome. Thus instead of getting a technical knockout, Duno waited in suspense before a split technical decision went his way.

"I underestimated him. I thought I could easily hit him," admitted Duno, adding that he was unable to let his hands go because of Rodriguez's punches. Still, he thought the fight should have been stopped by TKO.

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SOUTH AFRICA

BY DROEKS MALAN

The Western Cape region has always lagged behind the Eastern Cape and Gauteng in terms of quality fighters.

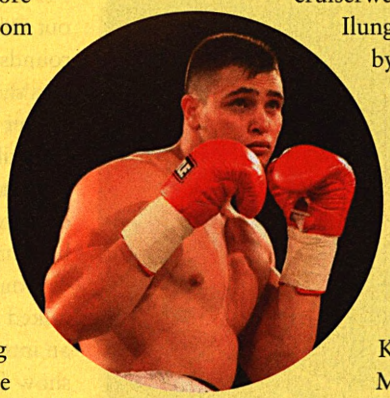
It is, however, home to South African light heavyweight champion Nicholas "The Natural" Radley, who defended his belt in front of his rabid Cape Town fans against game southpaw Frank Rodrigues, who resides in Gauteng.

An evenly matched fight on paper, which had the pundits split down the middle, became Radley's moment to shine. After a tentative start that saw the taller Radley trying to establish the distance while Rodrigues attempted to close the gap with mad rushes, the champion

seemed to find his groove in the fourth round, landing his jab and hard straight rights.

The following rounds resembled the classic confrontation between the matador and the bull. Rodrigues clearly struggled to overcome his reach and height disadvantage, and when he did pin the champion on the ropes in the sixth stanza, Radley proved to have the superior footwork as well, spinning out of danger.

A hard right, left hook combination from Radley in the seventh prompted more rushes and flurries from Rodrigues, but apart from a straight left to the body and the odd glancing right hook, he just couldn't nail the target.



Kevin Lerena has momentum in his favor.

Entering the 11th round, Radley seemed to be cruising toward a comfortable points win, but when he rocked Rodrigues with a hard left hook followed by an uppercut, he decided to close the show, depositing the challenger on the canvas with a straight right. Rodrigues got up in an attempt to make it to the final bell, but he was dropped yet again with a straight right. The challenger rose, only to eat another straight right followed by a cracking left hook that forced his corner to throw in the towel. With the win, Radley brings his record to 9-0 (8 KOs) while Rodrigues drops to 6-2 (4 KOs).

★★★

The Ring's No. 6-ranked cruiserweight contender, Kevin Lerena, kept busy by winning a wide 12-round decision over undefeated but inexperienced (7-0-1 at the time) Vasil Ducar. The man from the Czech Republic appeared completely out of his depth and offered little besides tremendous courage and durability.

Lerena kept pounding Ducar with his trademark explosive combinations to the head and body, but Ducar blocked what he could with his arms and gloves and absorbed the rest. Lerena is talented and has improved in leaps and bounds, but he can keep on winning indefinitely against the likes of Ducar. The time to make a run at a major belt is now.

★★★

South African-based Congolese cruiserweight contender Ilunga Makabu, trained by Damien Durand, son of South Africa's most prolific trainer, the late Nick Durand, made the trip into enemy territory to take on the dangerous Dmitry Kudryashov in Russia.

Makabu started out boxing behind his southpaw jab, mixing in some body shots toward the end of the first round, but in the second, the firefight that everyone expected kicked off. The Russian initiated the slugfest, but Makabu responded with a sweeping left hook that put Kudryashov down; in doing so, however, Makabu ate an uppercut and left hook that had him staggering toward the neutral corner.

In the ensuing rounds, the pair took turns staggering each other with vicious punches, a knockout victory by either fighter seemingly just one or two punches away. In the end, it was the faster hands and slightly tighter technique from Makabu that made the difference as he busted up the Russian's face into a crimson mess. Kudryashov, resembling a plane crash survivor, tried desperately to find a punch to turn the tide, but when a combination punctuated with a straight left from Makabu knocked him into the ropes in the fifth, the referee had seen enough and declared the African fighter a TKO winner.

Makabu has now won six straight fights by knockout since losing to Tony Bellew in his lone title shot in mid-2016, bringing his ledger to 25-2 with an impressive 24 knockouts. Another shot at the WBC title seems just around the corner.

Whether Makabu can win a world title is an open question, but one thing is for sure: Hang on to the edge of your seat!

Droeks Malan is the South African correspondent for The Ring. You can reach him via Twitter @droeksonboxing and read his blogs on couchpotatofightguru.blogspot.com.

JAPAN

BY YURIKO MIYATA

On June 19 in Chiba, Kazuto Ioka became the first Japanese boxer to win major world titles in four weight classes by stopping Aston Palicte of the Philippines at 1:46 of Round 10. With the knockout victory, Ioka earned the WBO 115-pound belt vacated by Palicte's compatriot Donnie Nietes, whom Ioka lost to in December. Ioka (24-2, 14 KOs) added the junior bantamweight strap to a collection that includes two 105-pound titles, one 108-pound belt and a flyweight title.

The accomplishment was achieved in thrilling fashion. Ioka was very composed, watching as the larger, well-muscled Palicte aggressively attacked in the early rounds. Ioka held his ground and started connecting with accurate combinations to the head and body by the middle rounds. When Palicte (25-3-1, 21 KOs) unleashed a barrage of heavy shots in Round 7, Ioka slipped in a wet corner to the alarm of the home audience, but he showed masterful defensive skills – dodging punches and countering with solid shots, especially lefts to the body. His finishing instinct was sparked when a right cross shook Palicte in the 10th round, and he flurried until the

referee halted the contest. It was not an easy triumph.

Ioka had announced his retirement after a win in April 2017, only to return to the ring in the U.S. last September. Three months later, he challenged Nietes for the WBO title in Macau and was edged by the Filipino master. His second shot at the belt was his first fight in Japan in two years.

"I knew I was privileged to have a second chance this soon," the 30-year-old veteran said after the Palicte fight. "I am so grateful to everybody who believed in me more than I did. I felt at home today. You all encouraged me a lot. I am very glad that I was able to show you all this victory. I'll keep challenging for whatever I want in boxing."

Ioka seems more ambitious now than before his brief retirement. It won't be long before he returns to an American ring.

On the Ioka-Palicte undercard, junior flyweight champ Hiroto Kyoguchi (13-0, 9 KOs) made the first defense of his Ring Magazine and WBA titles by outpointing previously unbeaten southpaw Tanawat Nakoon (11-1, 5 KOs), of Thailand, by unanimous decision (scores of 117-111, 117-111 and 117-112). Also, in a 10-round bout for the vacant WBO women's junior bantamweight title, Miyo Yoshida (13-1), a fighting mother of three, won a unanimous decision over American Casey Morton (8-2-3, 1 KO) by scores of 100-90, 100-90 and 99-91.

★★★

Since Naoya Inoue smashed Emmanuel Rodriguez to collect The Ring's vacant bantamweight championship and the IBF title on May 18 in Glasgow, thus earning a spot in the World Boxing Super Series final against Nonito Donaire, his name has been in the headlines of major newspapers and sports websites almost every day. The "Monster" is finally being recognized by Japan's general public beyond the boxing community, and they've eagerly read stories on his return home from Scotland, his visit to the IBF convention in Macau and, especially, about his fight against the legendary "Filipino Flash."

"Monster" fever is taking over Japan.

Inoue vs. Donaire seems like a miraculous encounter, given their ages, but it's a showdown that will resonate in Japan. Donaire, 36, who shared his prime with national stars such as Toshiaki Nishioka, Hozumi Hasegawa and Shinsuke Yamanaka, has been a huge name in Japan for many years. He is fond of Japan and visits there very often. Inoue has always looked up to Donaire and has wanted to emulate the Filipino star's success in the sub-featherweight divisions.

When Inoue turned professional in October 2012, Donaire had already won world titles in three weight classes (flyweight, bantamweight and junior featherweight) and was a week from facing Nishioka in Carson, California, for The Ring's vacant 122-pound championship.

Two years after his pro debut, Inoue would be compared to Donaire when, in just his eighth pro bout, he won the WBO 115-pound title by knocking out Omar Narvaez in two rounds. At the time, Donaire was the only other pro fighter to have defeated the skilled champion from Argentina – via 12-round decision in defense of his bantamweight titles in 2011.

Inoue (18-0, 16 KOs) talked about Donaire during an interview on the radio show *Ijuin Hikaru and Radio and...* in early June.

"He is a Philippine legend who has gotten through a lot of tough fights," said the 26-year-old three-division titleholder. "He is probably the best puncher I will face. His left hook says it all. I have to be very careful of it. Just thinking about it excites me."

In other words, Inoue is very motivated, which means he will probably show his ferocity in the form of precise punching technique, as he did after he witnessed Rodriguez's high skill level in the first round of the WBSS tournament. Fans can expect to see the best of the "Monster" against Donaire. His training camp for the future Hall of Famer was set to begin at the end of June.

★★★

Masayuki Ito lost his WBO 130-pound title to U.S. Olympian Jamel Herring by unanimous decision on May 25 in Kissimmee, Florida. Ito was eager to put on a

good performance in his first fight after signing with Top Rank, but to his huge disappointment he was controlled by the southpaw's strategy. Ito insisted on looking for the big right-hand KO and was, consequently, at a loss for tactical options.

"I might have pressured myself too much to hit hard," Ito told The Ring backstage after the fight. "I chased him and he dodged me. I expected the challenger to fight aggressively, but he made it more technical. I am disappointed with myself for not being able to change the flow of the fight. I know I still have much room for improvement, but right now I am too hopeless to even think of my future."

Before the fight, Ito saw the possibility for a unification bout with WBC titleholder Miguel Berchelt, and even told Bob Arum in person of his dream to fight Vasiliy Lomachenko. Arum smiled and said, "Take your time." Ito was willing to fight far away from home because he does not want to be known as just a local star; he won his title in Florida and wanted to defend it there. Before flying back to Japan, he spent a week with his family in Los Angeles, his training base, where he made up his mind to come back to the ring:

"It cannot end like this. I will stand up again. I will be back in America to fight."

His chief trainer, Rudy Hernandez, told him that moving up to the lightweight division is an option. It's been four years since Ito started building his team with Hernandez and assistant trainer Daisuke Okabe to polish his natural combative sense and athletic ability.

"My trainers gave me strategic ideas to win, but it took time for me to learn them completely," said Ito. "It was when I beat Christopher Diaz for the vacant WBO title (last summer) that I understood how they work in the fight really."

Ito, a latecomer to boxing with no amateur experience, is still 28 years old and just getting to understand the science of the sport. Though many Japanese champions in the past hung up their gloves when they lost their world titles, Ito won't. His talent is not in full bloom yet.

Kosei Tanaka wants to fight in the U.S.

★★★

WBO flyweight titleholder

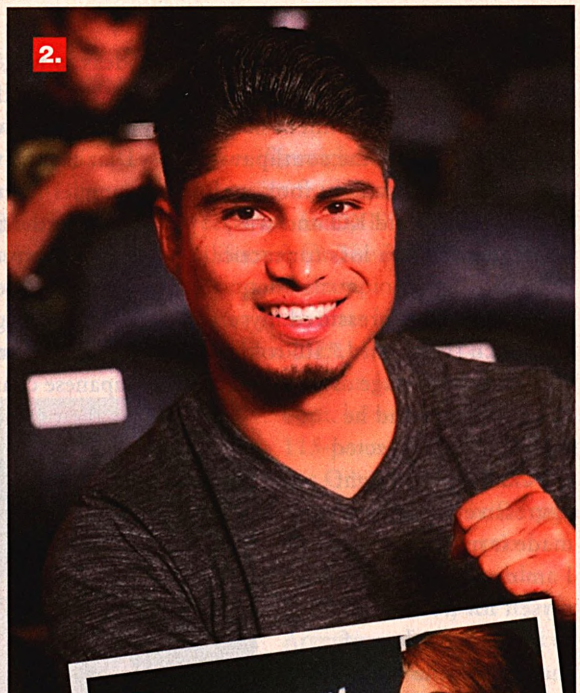
Kosei Tanaka has announced his second defense against the WBO's mandatory challenger, Jonathan Gonzalez, of Puerto Rico, on August 24 in his hometown of Nagoya. Tanaka is coming off back-to-back 12-round battles with tough compatriots: He took the WBO flyweight belt away from slugger Sho Kimura last September to get a title in a third weight class (in just his 12th professional fight, which tied Vasiliy Lomachenko's record). Then he made his first defense against former Ring, WBA and IBF junior flyweight champion Ryoichi Taguchi by unanimous decision in March. In those fights, Tanaka dared to engage in slugfests to entertain people. However, power is not his main weapon; he is a boxer of speed and excellent intelligence.

For his next fight, he will most likely entertain people with a different style. It will be very interesting to see how he deals with a world-class southpaw. The Puerto Rican challenger, who beat fellow Olympian McWilliams Arroyo twice in the amateurs, will be the first lefty Tanaka has faced with a world title on the line. Gonzalez is short (5-foot-2), but his range is enhanced by his ability to get in and out very quickly. The fight will be technical.

Tanaka began camp in early June in Manila, Philippines, where many quality southpaws reside. Along with his older brother Ryomei Tanaka, who is a big name in the Japanese amateur ranks, he sparred with three southpaws. Tanaka also has another motivation this time: The fight will be streamed by RingTV.com in the U.S. in cooperation with CBC TV in Japan.

"It has always been my dream to fight in America, and I am eager to make it happen," he told The Ring. "I am hoping that this live streaming will put me one step closer to an American ring. I have a variety of fighting styles, and I am especially proud of my speed; I would like American fans to witness it. I am excited to face Gonzalez, a WBO top contender, and I will fight in a way the audience can enjoy as much as I will."

AT THE FIGHTS



STYLES MAKE FIGHTS

Celebrities attend Anthony Joshua vs Andy Ruiz, Jr., NEW YORK, NY - June 1:
1. NBA Star Kyrie Irving 2. Mikey Garcia 3. Rosie Perez and Lauren Gardner
4. Tracy Morgan 5. Rapper Meek Mill

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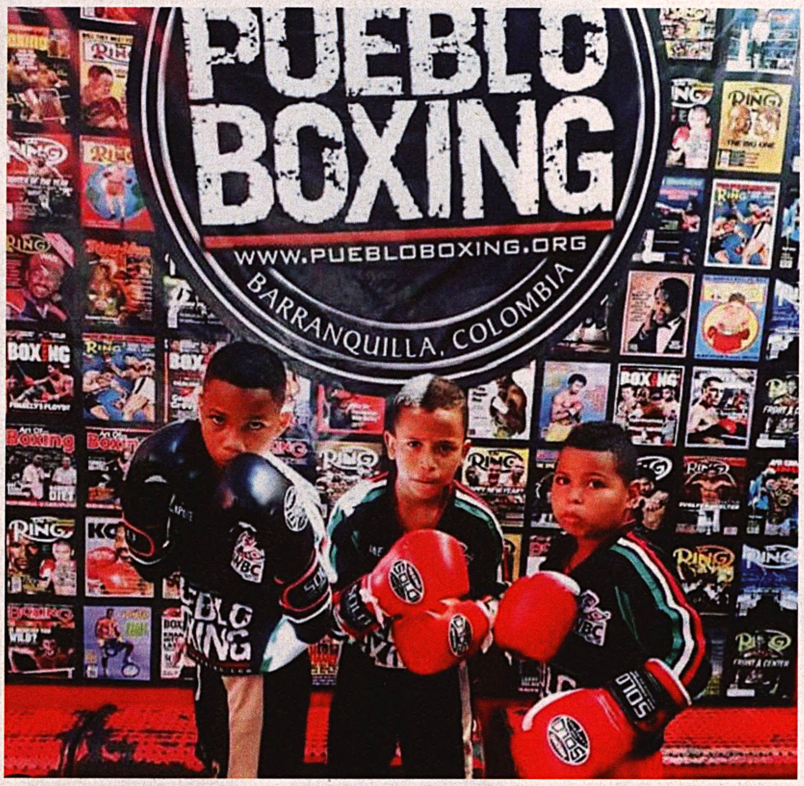

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FACING THE INEVITABLE

The monstrous Sonny Liston (right) had waited years for a shot at Floyd Patterson's heavyweight championship and was in no mood to be thankful during the weigh-in. Patterson's legendary trainer/manager Cus D'Amato – perhaps sensing the inevitable result – used Liston's unsavory reputation and mob ties as a means to downplay his status as No. 1 challenger. However, Patterson, a proud man, knew that Liston deserved his chance and agreed to face the formidable power-puncher on September 25, 1962, at Comiskey Park in Chicago. Liston destroyed the champion at 2:06 of the opening round and took four seconds longer to repeat that result in a Las Vegas rematch. RING

COMING UP

Manny Pacquiao is the slight odds underdog against unbeaten Keith Thurman, whom he'll face on July 20 in Las Vegas, but the 40-year-old veteran is a huge sentimental favorite among fans and media.

JULY

JULY 20 – Keith Thurman vs. Manny Pacquiao, welterweights (for Thurman's WBA title), Las Vegas (Fox PPV). Also, Caleb Plant vs. Mike Lee, super middleweights (for Plant's IBF title); Yordenis Ugas vs. Omar Figueroa Jr., welterweights; Sergey Lipinets vs. John Molina, welterweights.

JULY 20 – Dillian Whyte vs. Oscar Rivas, heavyweights, London (Sky Box Office).

JULY 27 – Gervonta Davis vs. Ricardo Nunez, junior lightweights (for Davis' WBA title), Baltimore (Showtime). Also, Yuriorkis Gamboa vs. Roman Martinez, lightweights.

JULY 27 – Jose Ramirez vs. Maurice Hooker, junior welterweights (for Ramirez's WBC and Hooker's WBO titles), Arlington, Texas (DAZN). Also, Tevin Farmer vs. Guillaume Frenois, junior lightweights (for Farmer's IBF title); Murat Gassiev vs. Joey Dawejko, heavyweights.

AUGUST

AUG. 3 – Adam Kownacki vs. Chris Arreola, heavyweights, New York (Fox). Also, Marcus Browne vs. Jean Pascal, light heavyweights.

AUG. 3 – Michael Conlan vs. Vladimir Nikitin, featherweights, Belfast, Northern Ireland (ESPN+)

AUG. 10 – Carl Frampton vs. TBA, featherweights, Philadelphia (ESPN+)

AUG. 24 – Kosei Tanaka vs. Jonathan Gonzalez, flyweights (for Tanaka's WBO title), Nagoya, Japan.

AUG. 24 – DeeJay Kriel vs. Samuel Salva, strawweights (for Kriel's IBF title), Manila.

AUG. 24 – Brandon Figueroa vs. Javier Nicolas Chacon, junior featherweights, Edinburg, Texas (Fox Sports 1)

AUG. 31 – Caleb Truax vs. Peter Quillin, super middleweights, Minneapolis (Fox). Also, Erislandy Lara vs. Ramon Alvarez, junior middleweights.

AUG. 31 - Vasiliy Lomachenko vs. Luke Campbell, lightweights (for Lomachenko's Ring, WBA and WBO titles, and vacant WBC title), London (ESPN).

SEPTEMBER

SEPT. 28 – Deontay Wilder vs. Luis Ortiz, heavyweights (for Wilder's WBC title), Los Angeles. Also, Anthony Dirrell vs. David Benavidez, super middleweights (for Dirrell's WBC title)

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